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Forum 2009 Publication Intro

It is with great pleasure that we present this publication, a compilation of the papers delivered at *Transnational Latin American Art from 1950 to the Present Day*, the 1st International Research Forum for Graduate Students and Emerging Scholars held at The University of Texas at Austin from 6-8 November 2009. The 2009 Forum was a collaboration between *The Permanent Seminar in Latin American Art* (The University of Texas at Austin) and *Meeting Margins* (University of Essex and University of the Arts London), conceived by Andrea Giunta (The University of Texas at Austin), Roberto Tejada (The University of Texas at Austin), Michael Asbury (University of the Arts London), María Iñigo Clavo (University of Essex), Valerie Fraser (University of Essex), Isobel Whitelegg (University of the Arts London), with the collaboration of Alexis Salas, the support of Luis Adrián Vargas-Santiago and Abigail Winograd as well as Amethyst Beaver, Paula Bossa, Doris Maria-Reina Bravo, Nisa Mason, Mari Rodríguez, and Michael G. Wellen. The University of Texas at Austin provided the administrative support of Jose Barroso, Amanda Butterfield, and Irene Roderick; The University of Essex that of Ian Dudley. The Forum was made possible in part by College of Fine Arts, Department of Art and Art History, Graduate School, and The Permanent Seminar in Latin American Art at The University of Texas at Austin; University of Essex; University of the Arts London; Meeting Margins; Arts & Humanities Research Council; TrAIN (Research Center for Transnational Art-Identity-Nation); Fundación PROA; Diane and Bruce Halle Collection; Centro Cultural de España en Buenos Aires; Fundación Telefónica; Fundación Espigas; ArteBA; Gustavo Bruzzone; Gabriel Werthein; and Mrs. and Mr. Cambiaso.

The presenters at the 2009 Forum were selected by an academic committee composed of Michael Asbury, María Iñigo Clavo, Valerie Fraser, Andrea Giunta, Roberto Tejada, and Isobel Whitelegg. The 2009 Forum was a meeting of scholars of modern and contemporary Latin American art from around the world, providing an opportunity for researchers from this diverse and growing field to come together and thus creating opportunities for transnational, multidisciplinary, and collaborative interactions, exchanges, and dialogues. This publication is an extension of the forum and a component in what we hope will serve as a record of the first of many future encounters.

The theme of the first Forum -the transnational character of Latin American art- was intentionally broad in order to highlight the ways in which the history of Latin American art does not exist on the periphery but is intimately connected to the broader history of art. The 2009 Forum focused on art from 1950 to the present day, particularly intra-Latin American exchanges, as well as encounters between Latin America, Europe and the United States. It explored contacts between individual artists and critics, movements, groups and institutions and wider geopolitical and cultural contexts that supported and provoked them, as well as the particular forms of art and its reception that transnational exchanges have generated. As we move forward, we hope to delve deeper into the issues raised in the first forum as well as those which fell beyond its purview.

Since the Forum 2009, The University of Texas at Austin opened The Center for Latin American Visual Studies (CLAVIS). As its first undertaking, CLAVIS produced this publication to make available the scholarship presented at the conference. We, the

coordinators, have overseen the development and organization of the publication. The papers are found here in the form that the authors submitted them or included as an abstract in the case that the author elected not to have the paper published. The publication can be found under the ISBN number 978-0-9827105-0-0 and is on the website domains of the Center for Latin American Visual Studies at the University of Texas, <http://www.utexasclavis.org/forums/>

We hope this archive of *Transnational Latin American Art from 1950 to the Present Day* will remain a pertinent resource for the study of modern and contemporary Latin American art.

Alexis Salas, Luis Adrián Vargas, and Abigail Winogrand
Coordinators

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Andrea Giunta

INTRODUCTION

I would like to thank everyone here today since it is you—the students, researchers and professors coming here from different universities—who make this 1st Forum for Graduate Students and Emerging Scholars possible. Along with my enthusiastic welcome, this is the perfect time to introduce different lines of history that have converged to produce this encounter. These histories are inevitably linked by contacts and transnational travel. In this sense, the symposium is not the study of a certain topic from the past, enclosed in its own time, but a study that explores an articulation of what has marked the most complex dynamic of studies on art in Latin America during recent years, in other words, the meetings held on art history in Latin America. In this sense, I would like to recall the relevance that the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas's colloquiums have had and continue to have, especially the one led by Rita Eder, held in the city of Zacatecas in 1993. It was a colloquium that produced an intersection between different generations that had never taken place before and it had a significant symbolic effect in subsequent history, making further situations of juncture and exchange possible, situations that continue today. It is in this spirit that the 1st Forum for Graduate Students and Emerging Scholars has been conceived and is presented, reformulating platforms and objectives.

However, before considering the specifics of this encounter, I would first like to revisit the story of the group of circumstances that led us to its organization. In one sense, the story is linked to my own passage from the Universidad de Buenos Aires and the University of Texas at Austin and a very recent, active history of activity that I relinquished before leaving Buenos Aires. This was at the CeDIP, Centro de Documentación, Investigación y Publicaciones that I

founded at the Centro Cultural Recoleta, in the city of Buenos Aires. During two years I was its Director, and it was there that I met Isobel Whitelegg. She introduced me to *Meeting Margins*, the project they were developing on *Transnational Art in Europe & Latin America 1950 – 1978*, a new approach to the study of art from Latin America that questions the role traditionally ascribed to New York as the dominant force in modern art in the post-war years. The project is being led by: Michael Asbury (TrAIN, University of the Arts London), Maria Iñigo Clavo (University of Essex), Valerie Fraser (University of Essex) and Isobel Whitelegg (TrAIN, University of the Arts London).

I have the pleasure of presenting these colleagues as the co-organizers of this Forum, jointly with the Permanent Seminar in Latin American Art. When we met in Buenos Aires, Isobel invited me to form part of the project, and given that I was in transit between two institutions, I did so in the role of an External Advisor, along with Professors Dawn Ades, Oriana Baddeley, Guy Brett, Taína Caragol and Joanne Harwood, many of whom are present here today.



CeDIP_Centro de Documentación, Investigaciones y Publicaciones, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires.

ceDIP
Centro de Documentación
Investigación y
Publicaciones

CENTRO
CULTURAL
RECOLETA



CeDIP, Montevideo
Presentation, 2007



CeDIP, Buenos Aires,
Nelly Richard
Presentation, 2007





CeDIP , Buenos Aires, 2007
 Ursula DeVila presentation

ceDIP
 Centro de Estudios
 Documentales
 e Investigaciones
 Plurilingües
 CENTRO
 CULTURAL
 RECOLETA

TrAN
 Research Centre for
 Transnational
 Art - Identity - Nation

meet
 margins

THE PERMANENT
 SEMINAR IN
 LATIN AMERICAN ART

University of the
 Arts London

During the whirlwind of events that accompanied moving to a different city and a different country, we started up the Permanent Seminar in Latin American Art in Austin, together with a group of students who were every bit as dedicated, participative and brilliant as those I had left behind in Buenos Aires, and alongside a new colleague, Roberto Tejada. This is a good opportunity to present this project. The objective of the Permanent Seminar is to “renew contacts between young researchers, to create an international network for the exchange of ideas concerning Latin American art, and to discuss current research.” In this sense it will seek to encourage different forms of exchange. “These instances of exchange are based on the idea of constructing bridges between Austin’s academic community and that of other universities and research centers by fomenting critical discussions concerning the comparative history of Latin American and Latino Art and debates based on the notion of constructing knowledge horizontally across different parts of the continent and the globe.” During its first two semesters, the Permanent Seminar has operated as a bimonthly meeting where we get together to discuss members’ projects and texts in a context of relaxed conversation, over wine and shared meals, without the pressure of deadlines and curricular requirements. Artists such as Liliana Porter, Graciela Sacco or Jac Lerner have also made presentations at our meetings. Currently, the meetings take place on a weekly basis.

**PERMANENT
SEMINAR**
LATIN AMERICAN ART

Graciela Sacco, Austin,
2009



**PERMANENT
SEMINAR²**
LATIN AMERICAN ART

Graciela Sacco
Library intervention,
2009



Permanent Seminar, Graciela Sacco's presentation, 2009



Class with
Liliana
Porter and
Luis
Carrizosa
2008

Among the Seminar's projects, an annual conference or forum will be held, and as such, Isobel and Valerie's proposal of organizing the *Meeting Margins* meeting jointly with our encounter was a perfectly magical solution. We then began a process of dialog regarding what form the invitation would take and we reformulated the intellectual project according to the aims of both *Meeting Margins* and the Permanent Seminar. There were three fundamental changes. In the first place, we expanded the chronological timeframe: the invitation was extended to include the present, not only prior to 1978; secondly, the relationship between Latin American art and the United States (not only New York, but also Washington or Austin) was studied and not only in relation to European centers, as had been planned originally; finally, we included Spanish and Portuguese as the Forum's languages. Although English will be the predominant language circulating in the exchanges taking place during these days, the languages in use in Latin America have not been left out. All these changes were fundamental to the intellectual project that is the underlying spirit of the Permanent Seminar.

It is in this context then, that it gives me immense pleasure to see so many of you who were my students in Buenos Aires here in this encounter alongside new students from Austin, along with Edward Sullivan's students, who I met in New York, those from Mexico and Chile, and all those who I am meeting for the first time.

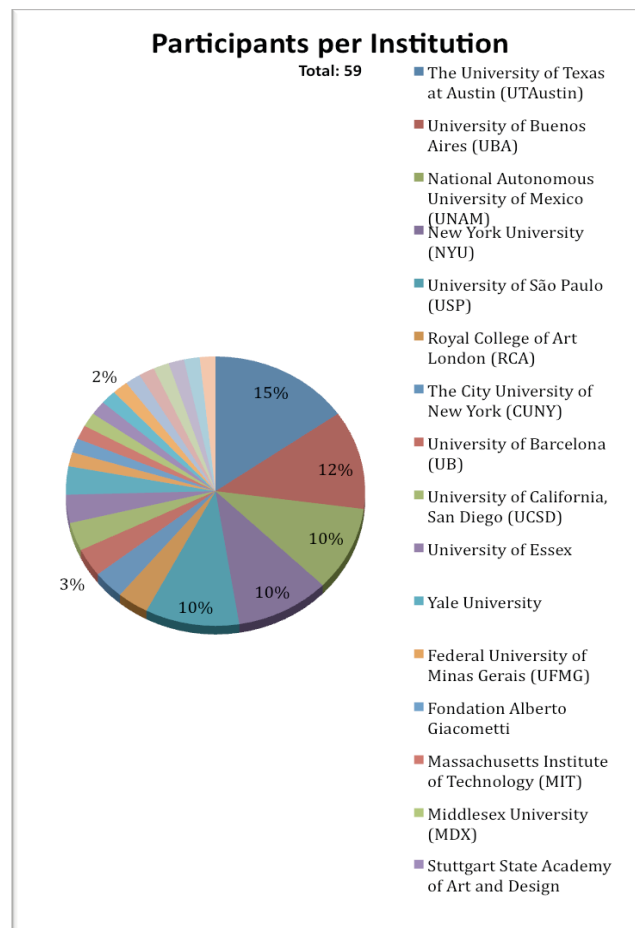


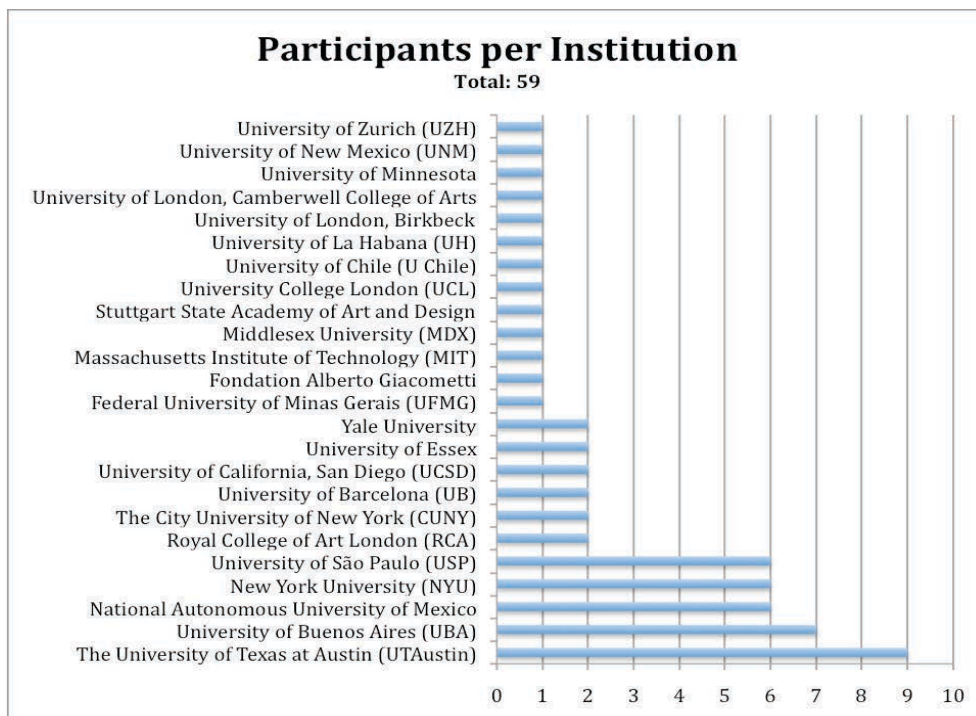
Buenos Aires's students



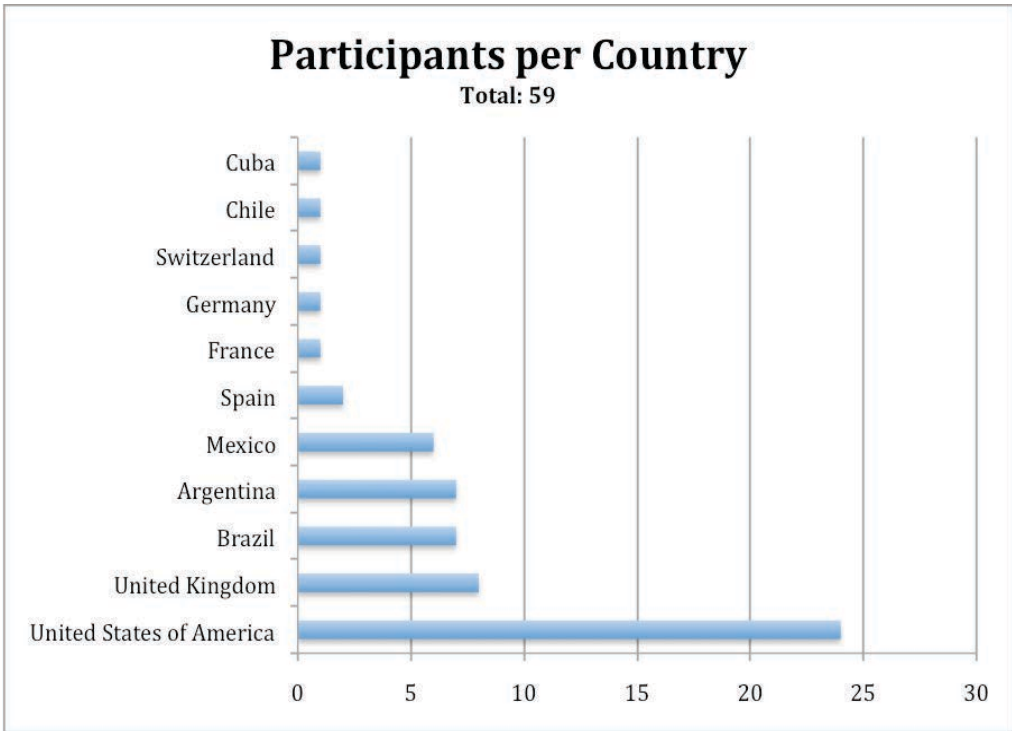
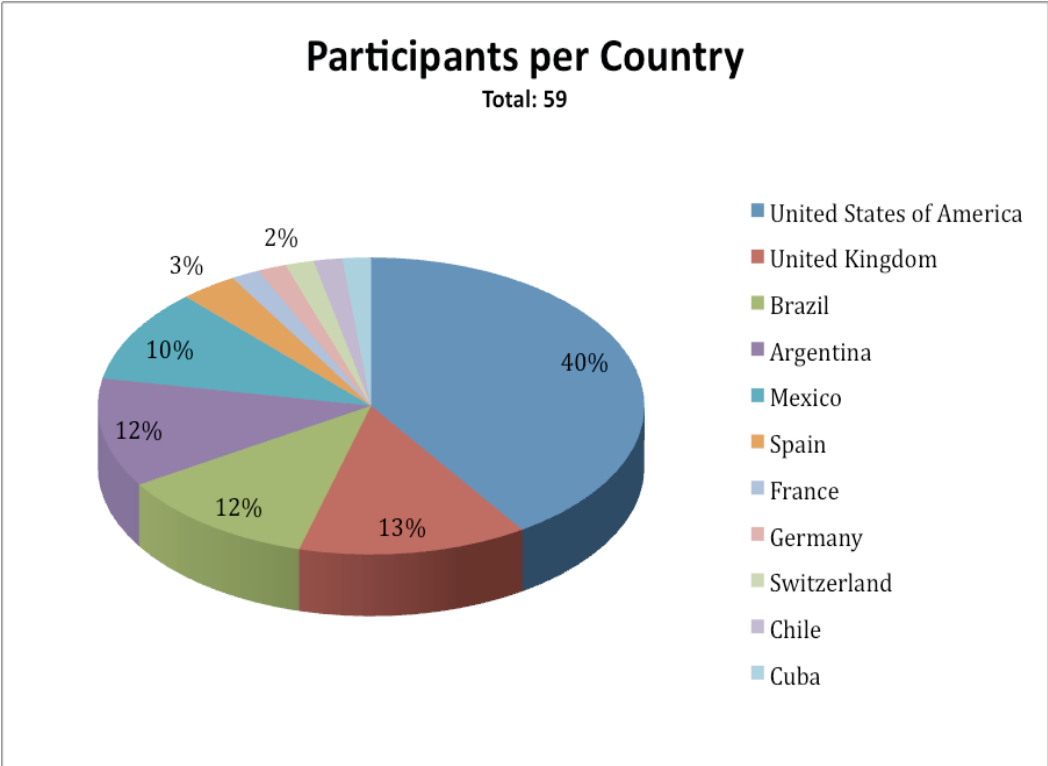
Austin and New York's students

I also must say that the response to the open call that we launched exceeded all of our expectations. We received over 100 papers and we accepted 60, although we would have liked to have been able to include more, since they all presented original topics that traced connections between one another, cross-referencing archives, hypotheses and objects of study. All this made us think that the Forum would constitute the first platform for exchange between emerging researchers from Latin America, Europe and the United States, enabling everyone to become familiar with other colleagues' investigations, in order to construct more specific networks of their own. One of the Permanent Seminar's fundamental missions is to encourage these arenas for exchange, as we will announce at the close of these meetings, and we propose to continue in their development in coming years.

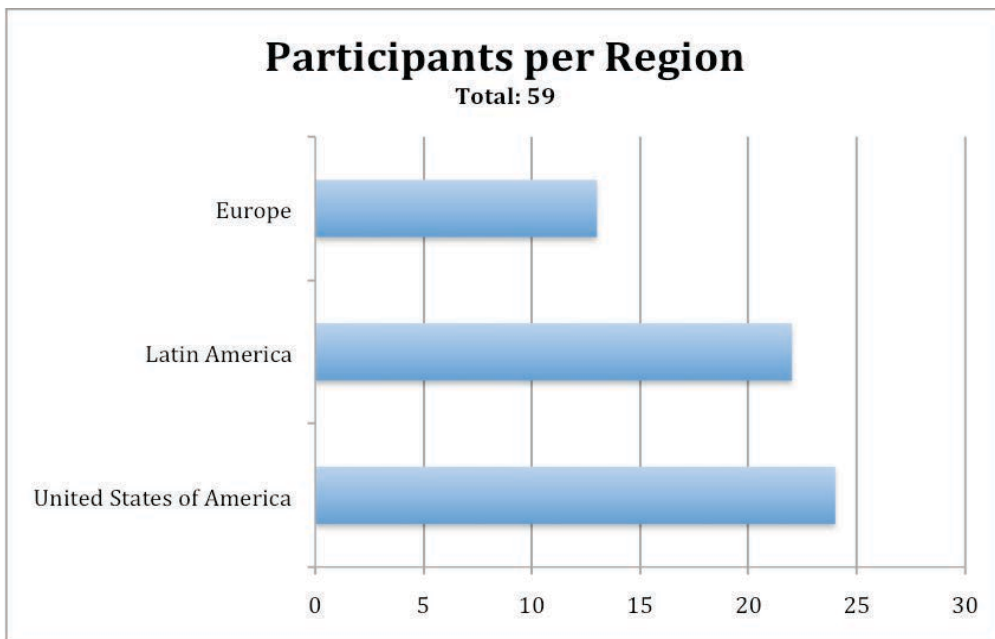
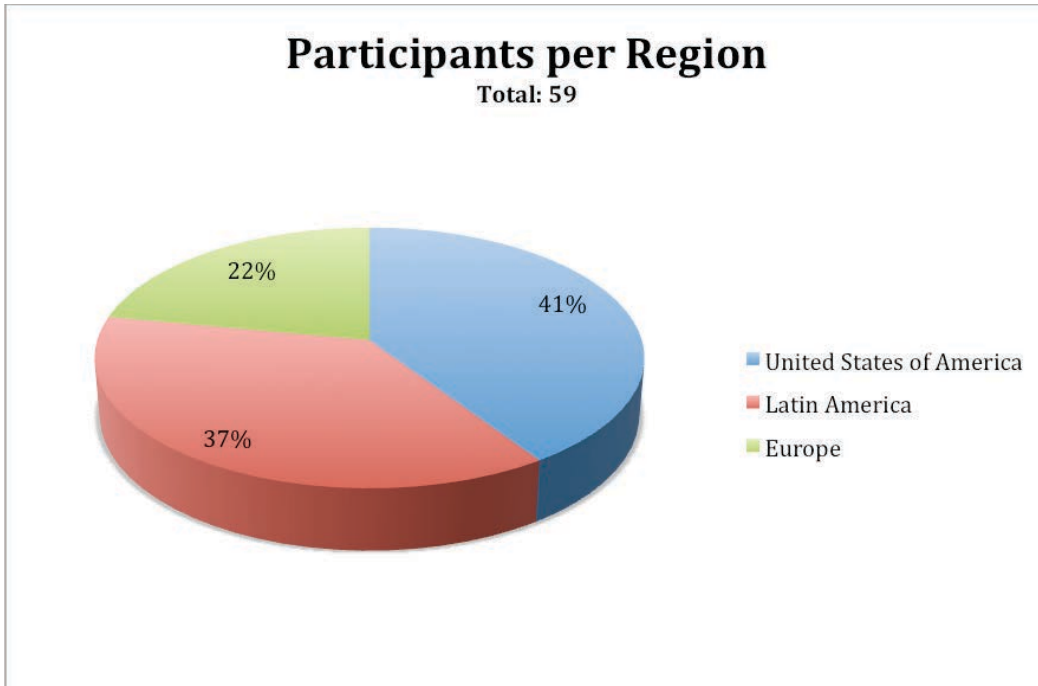




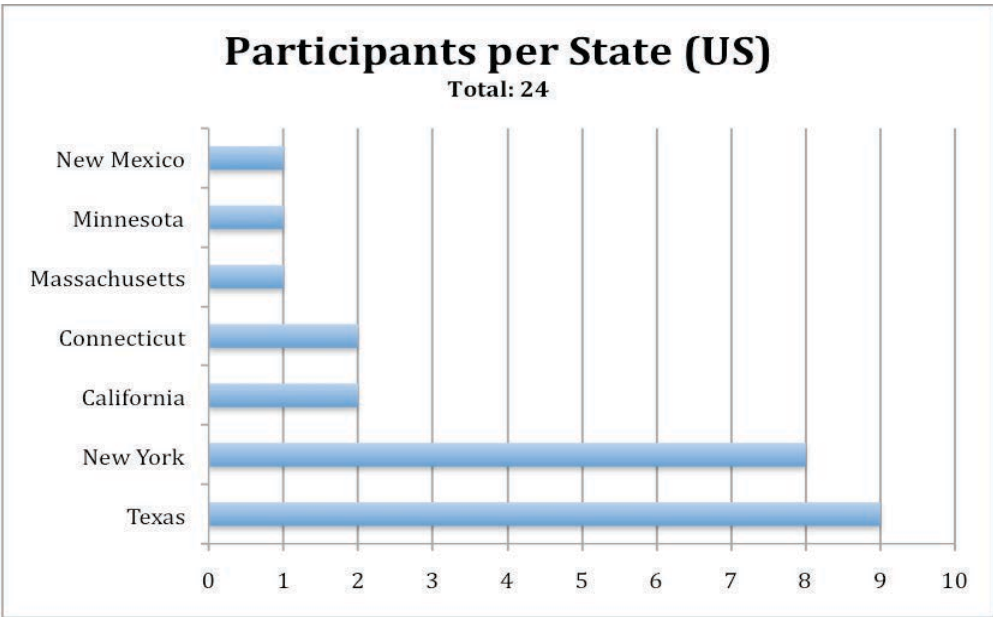
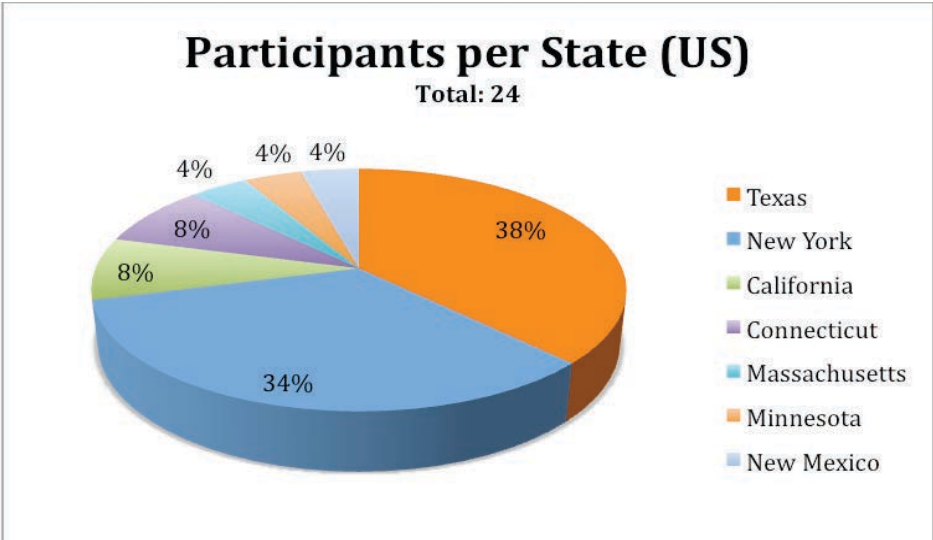
Participants per Institution to the 2009 Forum at Austin (by Luis Adrian Vargas Santiago)



Participants per Country to the 2009 Forum at Austin (by Luis Adrian Vargas Santiago)



Participants per Region to the 2009 Forum at Austin (by Luis Adrian Vargas Santiago)



Applicants and participants for Latin America, Europe and U.S. (by Luis Adrian Vargas Santiago)

The response to the open call was the point of departure for what wound up being the Forum's structure. We have nine working sessions, five in the morning and four in the afternoon, all held in parallel and followed by a session for conclusions on Sunday morning. The possibility that all of us might be able to listen to all of the papers would have been ideal, but between the project and its execution we had to make a series of decisions that meant sacrificing certain aspects but that allowed for conserving others. If we had selected 20 papers, we would have left to one side the possibility that this encounter has to generate contacts between a larger community of researchers, and this is clearly one of its aims. We know that much will happen in the working sessions and that much will also happen over coffees, lunches and dinners. This interpersonal exchange that the Forum will facilitate is central in terms of delineating new research policies in Latin American art, to which the University of Texas and the Permanent Seminar are dedicated: our mission's keywords are **bridges** and **horizontal exchanges of knowledge**, along with the creation of the arenas and institutional relations that make them possible.

At this time I would like to highlight what a pleasure it has been to work with our colleagues from England. In spite of distances, but thanks to Internet, we have been able to update projects and agendas in real time, with the same spirit of

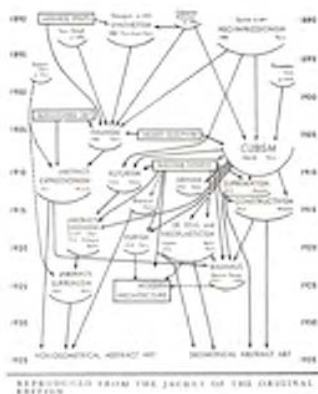
collaboration and dialog that inspires our initiatives. I am sure that this is only the beginning of a collaboration that will only grow stronger over time.

The topics included in the Forum will anticipate, in many ways, the principal lines of much recent discourse regarding the role of Latin American art studies. During the past few months I have heard different professionals questioning the existence of Latin American art, of studies of Latin American art, the Latin American art departments at museums and Latin American art history. What we used to call Latin American art will become integrated into what used to be referred to as international art, now called contemporary. As a first comment I must point out that these are things that I have heard during the past few months, and it does not seem to be a perception born outside of the parameters that apply to budget reductions taking place at museums, collections and in research and education policies following news of the 2008 crisis. However, let us leave these pragmatic reasons aside, because I believe that is it more interesting to take on reasons that are declarations from a new perspective in regard to Latin American art's insertion and the blurring of its boundaries. It is certain that the map of Latin America has undergone intense modifications. Today we cannot say that an artist like Alfredo Jaar is Chilean, when he lives outside of Chile and produces his work in relation to contexts that are very distant from his place of origin. Jaar is just one of a multitude of cases. It would seem to be more accurate to talk about the contemporaneity of art where Latin American art is included along with art from China or Africa. On the other hand, it is also certain that art from these regions has gained recognition and representation, basically since the '90s, that would allow us to refer to a new landscape. However, it is also true that neither museums nor the market have responded in an equivalent fashion, nor has research on these different regions that lie outside of the standards established by art's global circulation. In other words, if local institutions cannot reach a level of professionalization that is equivalent to that of the global circuit, they wind up being excluded. In spite of the fact that many artists travel, constantly circulating between different cities, there are many others who do not. The need for contextual research continues to exist, where not only museum and curatorial discourses are compared and contrasted, but also those produced by the field of social science, anthropology, history, sociology and literature. I am referring to archives, to specific and historical production relationships that we need to analyze in order to be able to comprehend an art made outside of Latin America as well as within it, art generated between local contexts and networks of contacts beyond. It is a process defined from the post-war period on, and one that has intensified in recent years. I am referring to situated archives, archives in contexts, not accumulation of documents on line, to be exhibit in glass boxes or in walls as fetichize objects, I am referring to archives to convert the papers in documents between specific questions, connected with the area of interest of a researcher. I am referring to a researcher as some one that assume the task of creating knowledge, not to scan archives for complementing the program of leader institutions. I am referring to a geopolitical question concerning the archives: for who, for what, why, how? The recent destruction of 80% of the work of Helio Oiticica make all these questions urgent questions. How we will preserve for the future the cultural patrimonies? Latin America has to sell their collections to be conserved in the central institutions? We, as researchers, have to work to bring

our artistic and archival patrimony outside of our countries? Are other alternatives –like working for the strongness of the museums and archival institutions in Latin American Countries? It is possible to find alternatives apart of nationalisms or regionalisms? How to research in a global world without loosing the local circumstances or the production of the art works. In other words, how I will be able to understand Chilean art if I am not in Chile for a while, interviewing, visiting archives, looking at collections? All of these are open questions, I don't have answers, just questions. And the certainty that we don't have to accept acritically the new magic solutions.

In this sense, Transnational Latin American Art does not propose to approximate a vision based on the substance of a Latin American being spread throughout the world as if it were a miraculous unction that is good in and of itself, marvelous for being Latin American. We are not suggesting, for example, the idea of a Latin American abstraction to be imposed as the best or only one possible as the result of an overriding logic. Order and progress, the motto of a State like Brazil's, dedicated to incessant development, does not serve as the basis for the complex developments that make up what abstraction consists of in that country. What I am trying to say is that discourse on the level of nation, just as those on a regional or continental level, have not been useful when it comes to considering the complexity of representations that are woven through cross-crossing dialogues. During the past 15, years a South-South axis has been proposed from the Bienal de La Habana as a new geography that disputes existing hegemony; an axis along which recent studies on conceptualism in its most recent phase of institutionalization are also positioned. This new map has played a positive role in that it allowed a view of articulations that had not as yet been undeciphered, that had not as yet been included in mainstream genealogies.

As such, we find ourselves in the midst of a phase of rewriting maps and relationships. The schemes that Alfred Barr delineated during the '30s do not serve us any longer. This is not only because a large part of the planet's art cannot be inscribed according to the arrows that fettered the canon's titles, but because there is no way of subjecting it to a single order, it is impossible to establish one evolutionary axis.



This order is, in a certain way, one that begins during the post-war period, with the maps that were restarted following the hiatus of the war that suspended modern trips to Europe. It is at this moment that we find young artists in Europe, looking at the works in person that they had become familiar with in faded or black and white reproductions.



Tomás Maldonado
Letter, Zürich, 1948



It is at this moment that exhibitions begin to travel and it becomes increasingly possible to see works pertaining to the historic *avant garde* (abstraction at the São Paulo Biennial comes to mind, or the first exhibition of modern art at the MAM in São Paulo or at the Instituto de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires in 1948 and 1949) and that saw exhibitions, trips and residencies multiply over time.



Groupe de Recherche d'Art
Visuel, Paris, 1956



The global world, that grand village in which borders no longer function, especially when it comes to understanding art, had already begun to emerge in a conventional sense during the post-war era. It was then that it became possible for not only ideas, but bodies to come into contact with one another. They were bodies marked by history, no longer inscribed only in illustrations of travel, but, as we see here in this conference, by exiles, diaspora, internal exile and new residency. It also entails bodies of work moved to different places, installed in galleries where tropical music can be heard. Music, like these images, like the forms, sounds and meanings are things that resist dying. Bodies, works and sounds are all in passage. In Argentina during the '70s and early '80s, Brazil represented the form of freedom. In spite of the fact that there was a dictatorship in power there as well, it was different. To hear a song by Caetano Veloso in the Gran Rex theater was to feel like you were in a bubble of freedom, at least for a moment.



This is a forum about formative backgrounds, contacts, residency, and the migration of ideas and images. All this is inscribed within the framework of an encounter that brings together a multi-national group of researchers focused intransnational Latin American art, probably the most numerous and heterogeneous that has been assembled to date. All this is what I wanted to mention and to celebrate today.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to take this moment to thank all of you without whom this encounter would not have become a reality. I would like to thank everyone at the University of Texas who made organizing this conference

possible: College of Fine Arts, Department of Art and Art History, Graduate School, y The Permanent Seminar in Latin American Art, The University of Texas at Austin; also to the Universities and institutions that coorganized the Forum: University of Essex; University of the Arts London; Meeting Margins; Arts & Humanities Research Council; TRAIN (Research Center for Transnational Art-Identity-Nation)

At the Department of Art and Art History I would like to thank to José Barroso, Amanda Butterfield, and Irene Roderick.

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And to all the colleagues who have come from abroad to participate in this Forum: Welcome to everybody to the University of Texas at Austin.

Packaging Latin America in New York in the 1960s and 1970s

By Jacqueline Barnitz

In the last 60 or so years, the field of Latin American art has undergone big changes. Thanks to the work done by the University of Essex, University of the Arts London besides the University of Texas through the years, we tend to forget how bleak this field was before the 1960s. It still is to some extent, outside of our wonderful ivory towers in university departments. The most visible expression of what is thought to be an overview of Latin American art can best be seen in exhibitions. Consequently what I propose here is to review some examples of the 1960s by way of exhibitions and catalogues— primarily in New York where I spent many decades of my life.

My introduction to Latin American art in the early 1960s was accidental but lasting: accidental because my interest was sealed by my chance encounter with many Argentine artists in New York from the late 1950s on (José Antonio Fernández-Muro, Sarah Grilo, Fernando Maza, Carlos Squirru, Luis Felipe Noé, Jorge de la Vega, etc.); lasting because I've been at it ever since (for the last 50 years). A trip to Buenos Aires in 1962 sealed my interest with my discovery of an exciting art scene there. In addition to the abundance of Argentineans in New York in the 1960s, there were numerous group and solo exhibitions that included artists from many other Latin American countries as well all of whom were absorbed into this “Latin American” maze.

My problem with the concept of such a body as “Latin American” grew as I encountered individuals from Guatemala, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Peru, etc. and later, Brazil, who came to be known under this blanket name, but were in fact too diverse to be packaged comfortably in such a broad way. In self-defense and for teaching and writing purposes, I then sought common national traits for them but found that difficult to negotiate as well beyond the obvious cultural east / west coast polarities. Although their work fell stylistically into certain broad categories like figurative, formalist abstraction, geometric, there was no single overall style or mode of expression, least of all folkloric, that characterized them except for an occasional reference to their urban experience in New York.¹ The artists referred to themselves generally as “Latin Americans” as though defining a sort of overall community and mode of self identification abroad. But why would a Peruvian, Uruguayan or a Colombian seem comfortable embodying a whole continental identity? Because of this homogenization, I’d like to look into some constructions and attitudes in the 1960s and 1970s about identities imposed on them by the U.S/N.Y. art community as well as why the artists themselves, with a few Argentine exceptions, accepted this blanket identity. In the 1960s this categorical identity was reinforced by exhibitions that sought to present them as a unified group.

Many artists had gone to New York on Guggenheim, Fulbright or other fellowships in the 1960s and extended their stays, beyond the fellowship term. There they found a unique art dynamic not always present in their own country outside of Argentina. Except for the São Paulo Bienals, Brazil was still relatively unknown abroad until the late 1960s. In New York artists could see museums and all the current international modes of

expression with pop as a strong presence at the time. Besides abstraction—better known by Spanish and Latin American artists as *informalismo*, they could see pop, optical, kinetic, installation and technological art; find art critics, collectors, galleries and a transnational ambience. This particular period ended in the late sixties and early seventies as some artists left and others arrived. Some of the later arrivals came as exiles—especially the Brazilians who had not been in New York until after 1968. This shift in the demographics also affected the character of “Latin Americanism” as a whole new generation of Latin Americans exhibited and interacted with the city and its possibilities. Many of the newer artists were highly politicized as the earlier ones were not.²

My own interest in this subject came at a time where there was considerable focus on Latin America, especially from 1963 on. These peak years corresponded to the New York Worlds Fair of 1964-65, when many art events were coordinated with art institutions and an unusual amount of promotional activity took place; 1965 was also proclaimed Latin American Year as Cornell University in Ithaca and some other universities throughout the country established programs of study focusing on Latin America.³ Private art galleries joined in the diffusion of Latin American art. Besides the Galería Bonino, -- Bianchini, Howard Wise, Bertha Schaeffer, Contemporaries, and Cisneros were among the most active. Furthermore, between 1964 and 1970 artists from Latin America were also included in major general exhibitions such as *The Responsive Eye* (1965), *The 60ies* (1967) and *Information* (1970) all at the Museum of Modern Art, in addition to several other exhibitions outside of New York.⁴

A key example of a group exhibition devoted to Latin Americans was *Magnet: New York* of 1964 at the Galería Bonino on 57th Street. Sparing the viewer from the clichés about Latin American art, the small catalogue had a solid blue cover. Although not the first exhibition to represent the art of a whole continent and a half, it played a large part in framing this art for a significant and jaded audience. Among its 28 participants were artists as diverse as Rodolfo Abularach (Guat.), Julio Alpuy (Urug.), Fernando Botero (Col.), Marcelo Bonevardi (Arg.), Luis Camnitzer (Urug.), José Antonio Fernández Muro (Arg.), Sarah Grilo (Arg.), Armando Morales (Nic.), Luis Felipe Noé (Arg.), Maria Luisa Pacheco (Bol.), Liliana Porter (Arg.), Omar Rayo (Col.) and Kazuya Sakai (Arg.). Although the focus of *Magnet: New York* was on the artists' common Latin American origin, it was less in the packaging of this group than it was in the examination of what drew them to New York as its title implies.

Magnet: New York was organized by the Rockefeller-funded Inter-American Foundation for the Arts, known as the Center for Inter-American Relations in the 1960s and 1970s and now the Americas Society.⁵ Among its 28 participants there were one or two artists each from Nicaragua, Guatemala, Mexico, Uruguay, Bolivia, Cuba, Chile, Venezuela, four from Colombia, and twelve from Argentina attesting to the dominance of this group in New York at the time. This was due to a dynamic exchange between Buenos Aires and New York, and a generous distribution of awards supplementing foundation grants to artists through the Instituto Torcuato di Tella in Buenos Aires. *Magnet* comprised a broad array of figurative and abstract paintings some of which included floating numbers and letters as in the work of Sarah Grilo, Kazuya Sakai, Zulema Damianovich, and Stela

Newbery. After brief catalogue introductions by Nelson Rockefeller, then governor of New York State, and Adlai Stevenson, then US representative at the UN, the exhibition catalogue featured two brief essays, one by Robert Wool, then president of the Inter-American Foundation in the Arts, (later known as the Center for Inter-American Relations, now the Americas Society), the other by Thomas M. Messer, then Director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

Wool blatantly noted that interest currently shown in Latin American art was not only for aesthetic reasons, but political ones as well since the Cuban revolution made it necessary to pay Latin America some attention. He then discussed the pros and cons for Latin American artists living in New York citing the challenge facing them and what people expected of them. He commented on problems for artists of incorporating the new without being derivative or being labeled so.⁶

Messer recalled a previous experience of his when he tried to present an exhibition to an “ignorant” public. I quote:

When I presented a selection of Latin-American painting at Boston’s Institute of Contemporary Art (in 1959; it also went to Dallas) public anticipation and reaction went through three distinguishable phases. There was first an expectation of something overtly Latin-American and picturesque and corresponding disappointment at the absence of an immediately apparent Latin American content. This was followed by the assumption that Latin-American art as such does not exist. Finally came the realization that the Latin-American identity was discernible in the forms of an international style.⁷

Of course what is apparent here is that the public’s image of what Latin American art was, remained fixed in the work of the earlier Mexican muralists and their quaint representation of natives. Since then, this image has undergone some changes and was usurped by Frida Kahlo after the publication of *Frida*, Hayden Herrera’s biography of the

artist in 1983 that in turn fed on the then 10-year old feminist movement and rendered Kahlo's story especially compelling. Since then Fridamania has abated at least on the East coast, followed by a run on Helio Oiticica for a while in the late 1980s and 1990s.⁸ More recently artists seem to determine their fates more as individuals on transnational terms. Luis Felipe Noé's essay "Does Art from Latin America Need a Passport?" of the 1980s sums up current attitudes among many artists.⁹ In the late 1980s the Indianapolis Museum exhibition *Art of the Fantastic* caused a furor because of its alleged and apparent stereotyping.¹⁰ Although the Museum of Modern art's 1993 blockbuster exhibition *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth-Century* featured a quaint image of Tarsila do Amaral's painting *O ovo Urutu* (The Egg Urutu) on the cover of its catalogue, the latter contained enough serious essays by multiple scholars to be useful¹¹ and did not generate the criticism that *Art of the Fantastic* did because of its title.

The public for *Magnet: New York* was largely from the art community whereas the one for *The Emergent Decade* at the Guggenheim Museum was directed to a broader audience. Next to none of the 38 works in *Magnet* made reference to the artists' country or culture of origin. But in both exhibitions several artists referenced their current urban experience in New York in some way as we shall see. Although the curators of *The Emergent Decade* tried hard to find some Latin American characteristics within a general adherence to figurative and abstract modes as is evident in the catalogue's cover illustration *Landscape* by Armando Morales, the majority of works displayed no obvious sign of either culture of origin or current locale leaving critics scrambling for some crutch.

Two critics took on the role of judges in the mid sixties, Lawrence Alloway and Thomas Messer. In a 1965 article Alloway, curator of the Guggenheim Museum at that time (1962-66) referred to the work of De Szyszlo as comprising a type of “Inca cubism” and commented that:

At present, Latin American artists are receiving increased attention (and painting better than at any previous time, fortunately).¹²

In spite of Messer’s previous defense of “Latin American” art, his contribution to *The Emergent Decade* catalogue was in the form of judgments embedded in a series of letters to art directors, critics and curators in the individual countries instead of as an essay:

What I saw in a week . . . in Brazil was diverse and timely . . . interesting although insufficiently substantial to make the experience constantly nourishing.

Since he was specifically looking for paintings, he apparently remained unacquainted with the work of Ligia Pape, Lygia Clark and Helio Oiticica. He goes on:

My pace (in Uruguay) could not have been sustained . . . had it not been possible to dismiss many works . . . either because they were obviously inferior in quality . . . or clearly superficial and derivative.

My stay in Peru was not very long . . . I doubt that my impressions would have changed a great deal even if I could have stayed a fortnight.¹³

To give these statements the benefit of the doubt, they may have been intended to point up the unique quality of his selections for this show.

Messer also wondered why Argentinean artists felt compelled to go to New York, Paris, Rome. Did anyone ever ask why U.S. artists traveled? These attitudes of the 1960s were less blatant in more specialized exhibitions such as those of Julio Le Parc and the Groupe de Recherche d’Art Visuel (known as GRAV) at the Contemporaries Gallery where

internationalism was taken for granted. Besides, these works offered entertainment to viewers because of their interactive character therefore fitting more neatly with the pop mentality as is evident in the pleasure children took playing with kinetic works in Le Parc exhibitions. On the other hand, critics dismissed these works as belonging to the “School of Paris” hence not of the here and the now.

The Emergent Decade catalogue also compensated for the absence of obvious Latin American content in the works exhibited by including a series of photographs by Cornell Capa of the artists at work and play or in their own habitats: the Argentine painter Marta Peluffo, looking very intense and disheveled as she worked; Fernandez-Muro working in his upper East Side duplex studio in New York; the Chilean Ricardo Yrarrázaval intensely contemplating from a distance the next move on the painting in progress with the help of his wife in his Santiago studio; Fernando De Szyszlo showing some ancient architecture outside of Lima to his son, studying some ancient textiles, and in a family scene, blowing cigarette smoke on his son (that was supposed to be cool at the time); the Colombian Alejandro Obregón drinking in some bar (possibly competing with the NY abstract expressionists); Jesús Rafael Soto wildly playing the guitar solo or with other musicians as he often did during his years in Paris; and Maestro Rufino Tamayo as the Mexican representative of modernity, in his studio.¹⁴

The social life of the New York-based artists also captured by Capa, played no small part in their and their friends’ and associates’ lives: Argentineans customarily assembled in a restaurant on Avenue of the Americas where they recreated the restaurant dinner party as

they had experienced it in Buenos Aires, followed by music and singing. They also attended gatherings in one another's homes as in a photo of a reunion with Sara Grilo, Fernandez-Muro, an Argentinean psychiatrist, and others. It was these gatherings that helped define Latin American artists as a community with mutually reinforcing and supportive roles. They had in fact created social cells in New York that helped them negotiate their daily lives and preserve their differences from the Anglo-Saxon world they lived in. Since non Latin Americans often joined these gatherings, the artists also gained visibility within broader mainstream circles.

Not all the artists in *The Emergent Decade* were living in New York but all were represented by a work painted for this exhibition or done a few months or weeks prior. Nor were all the artists living in the city responding to their urban experience, but some clearly did. Asked why Sarah Grilo filled her abstractions with numbers and letters as she had her painting *Inferno or X on 13th Street* (1964), she answered "because they are all around us."¹⁵ Fernández-Muro, who was married to Grilo, had for years worked loosely with geometric shapes that had no narrative meaning. In New York where he lived from 1962 through the 1960s, he sought an alternative to gestural abstraction on the one hand and to hard-edged geometry on the other.¹⁶ After experimenting with diverse uses of pointillism obtained mechanically with stencils, he allowed New York's resources to solve his problems: identification plaques on buildings in relief and utility hole covers in the streets. He would go out into the night with metal foil and furtively make embossed impressions of these then incorporate them in paintings often with humor and irony. *Secret Banner* (1964) in *The Emergent Decade* show parodies national flags. Although

his paintings did not look like Jasper Johns's, he used the theme of flags including the Argentine flag, in a variety of ways all of which incorporated utility hole covers.

Typically, Fernández-Muro was affected by pop art but did not turn this potentially pop icon-- the utility hole cover-- into a pop object. It served other metaphorical and formalist purposes. Kasuya Sakai, also from Argentina, in a transitional period used letters in paintings he did in New York and so did several other Argentinean artists. This tendency was less pronounced in the work of artists from other Latin American countries less apt to absorb and re-elaborate the cultural signs of the host country.

Others like María Luisa Pacheco who exhibited a lot in the 1960s but surprisingly was not included in *The Emergent Decade*¹⁷ claimed to have found her Bolivian roots in New York where she had lived since the mid 1950s. Her large collaged paintings often incorporated thin sheets of plywood painted with shades of reds, blue, blacks and white that one would find in ancient textiles while her dynamic shapes were meant to evoke ragged mountain peaks if not tall buildings as in her large triptych *Catavi* of 1974.

Although her finished work echoed the apparent spontaneity of the Abstract Expressionists, her surface effects were most often due to a laborious, conscious build up of her materials rather than to heavy brushwork. Others like the Uruguayan Julio Alpuy steeped in the theories of Torres-García chose to shut out the city he had come to live in during the 1960s by covering his windows so he could not see the street. He continued to pursue Torres-García's theories of universalism and for that reason wanted access to New York's museums rather than the life of the city itself. Yet others pursued forms of art that

reflected their previous experience for instance studying architecture like Marcelo Bonevardi as in his carefully assembled construction, *Column*.

A number of smaller galleries in New York also helped draw attention to these artists by holding group exhibitions of their work. The Cuban artist, critic and collector Florencio García Cisneros, featured the same artists in his gallery as did the Bonino. In 1964 Cisneros published a bilingual book *Forty Latin American Painters in New York*¹⁸ that included many of the same artists as did *Magnet: New York* but in contrast to Bonino's abundance of Argentinean artists (12 of the 28 artists in the show), Cisneros predictably featured 11 Cubans and many more Central Americans than had Bonino. It also included five Dominicans and one Puerto Rican contributing to the diverse packaging and fragmentation across the board of what people thought "Latin America" looked like. Whether it was Cisneros' relative upper West side location or the character of the gallery's promotional contacts or lack thereof, it did not come to be well-known to the general highbrow public and a number of its artists fell into obscurity once the sixties were over.

Most of the artists who moved to New York in the 1960s worked as individuals and showed at top notch galleries. Others avoided galleries altogether thus escaping the dangers of packaging. One of these was the Argentinean Marta Minujin in New York from 1966 to 1968. During this time she did use the gallery as venue and created large interactive installations, some with live animals as in *El Batacazo* (The Long Shot) of 1966 with live rabbits at the Bianchini Gallery. In others, she utilized technology as in the

Minuphone of 1967, a real working phone in a booth conceived and built with the help of Bell Labs, at the Howard Wise Gallery. The booth was filled with surprise effects when the occupant attempted to make a call. Instead of a Latin American group, Minujin knew the Warhol crowd and Experiments in Art and Technology (EAT) people and took advantage of their offerings.

Another unusual case was that of Helio Oiticica who subsequently avoided galleries. He first came to New York on the invitation of Kynaston McShine to participate in the 1970 *Information* show at the Museum of Modern Art. He returned a few months later as the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship. In 1969 he had exhibited his *Tropicalia* within an installation known as *Eden* at the Whitechapel Gallery in London. *Tropicalia* was first shown in Rio in 1967. Oiticica was to spend the next 7 or 8 years in New York avoiding commercial galleries altogether. He spent time working on maquettes for installations but denuded of all the props of *Tropicalia* most of which were never produced. But he did carry out large interactive room-sized environments with the help of students at the Rhode Island School of Design and at the Albright Knox. During these years Oiticica belonged more to an underground community related to Warhol and Jimmy Hendrix, and carried out multimedia installations not well known to the public and that culminated in short films.¹⁹

The *Information* show marked the culmination and end of the 1960s along with the tendency to package Latin Americans into self-defining groups. Generally it represented a huge variety of daring projects from Duchamp playing chess with a nude woman, to the

moon landing or Ché relaxing on a bed drinking mate; images of Vietnam in violent war scenes, or illustrating liberated sexuality. *Information* included at least thirteen Latin Americans as individuals or in groups such as the *New York Graphic Workshop* founded by Guillermo Castillo, Liliana Porter and Luis Camnitzer as its representatives. Minujin was included in *Information* with a photo of her in her Minuphone and so were three other artists, the Brazilians Oiticica--Cildo Meireles and Guilherme Magalhaes Vaz. Although not professionally affiliated, Oiticica and Meireles had statements in the catalogue that began similarly. Oiticica stated: "I am not here representing Brazil; or representing anything else; the ideas of representing—representation—etc. are over." Meireles started with: "I am not here, in this exhibition, to defend either a career or a nationality. But I would rather speak about a region which does not appear on official maps, a region called the SOUTHERN CROSS." He went on to refer to the division of Brazil into the well-known picturesque Eastern side of the country, and the lesser-known one created by the colonists' division of the territory through the Treaty of Tordecilhas.²⁰ On one side, the sterilized beaches (referring to Rio), on the other a spreading jungle. Both artists began by defining what they were not before proceeding with what they meant to represent, Oiticica rejecting traditional marketable art, Meireles, the stereotypes sought by tourists. More than others, Brazilians tended to fuse modernity with primitivism in very original ways.

Information itself represented and revealed a variety of political stands and events that had emerged after 1968 besides conceptual propositions and all the new media.²¹ In the words of Camnitzer, the "Information" exhibition . . . validated subversive Latin

American art as acceptable within the mainstream.” He also noted the multitude of diverse groups and communities both in Latin America and the U.S. that formed a “moiré” pattern—that is a mosaic that did not lend itself to packaging nor to marginalizing.²²

The politicization of art after 1969 in New York owed something to the critic Lucy Lippard who co-founded the Art Worker’s Coalition and was instrumental in the rise of the feminist movement. Her activism was spurred on by a trip she took to Buenos Aires in 1968 where she discovered how conceptualism could be applied to art and utilized for political purposes. At the time Argentina was under a military government and artists had just carried out a project *Tucumán Arde* (Tucuman Burns), a highly politicized and polemical work that depended entirely on communications media to publicize social injustices in Tucumán. Lippard brought her activism back to New York helping to establish a space for other politicized artists and critics, both from the US and Latin America.²³

During the early 1970s a group of politicized Latin American artists who exhibited at the Lerner-Heller Gallery formed a community of their own, gathering in one another’s studios. They included Rubens Gerchman (Brazilian) who also produced short films, Leonel Góngora (Colombian), Vita Giorgi (Mexican), Antonio Henrique Amaral (Brazilian) and Arnold Belkin (Mexican, originally from Vancouver). These artists were especially hostile to the Center for Inter-American Relations known for its exhibitions of the more traditional, commercially viable and mainstream Latin Americans. To defend

their principles, these politicized artists founded the Museo Latinoamericano in 1971, an alternative museum, but in name only. It had no physical space but existed through the artists themselves who met regularly in one another's studios. In a statement, its members declared that they rejected "certain biennials and officialist exhibitions that in our opinion do not conform to our social and ethical principles." As representatives of the Museo Latinoamericano, these same artists staged the Contrabienale from 1969 to 1971 primarily to denounce the São Paulo Bienals because of Brazil's military government. Many of the contributors to the boycott had been asked to participate but declined as per their individual statements voicing their views and objections.²⁴

In a statement of purpose in the single issue of their "organ" *Frente* they declared that the Museo Latinoamericano "proposes a transformation to attain an ample core (nucleus) of Latin Americans involved in the task of spreading the new cultural phenomenon that is emerging."²⁵ This task demanded a social identity and commitment, and they perceived themselves as the prophets of this commitment. This idea was illustrated in Arnold Belkin's painting *Rock Man* in muted colors, one of a series of existential representations of humans trapped by external circumstances. They also published a letter to the Center for Inter-American Relations in *Frente* outlining their complaints. They accused the Center of misrepresenting the culture of their countries and utilizing it for political ends. They also criticized the Center for not catering to a broad enough public and not representing the marginalized groups in the U.S. They demanded an administrative reshuffling at the Center which that institution predictably ignored.²⁶

Although many of the artists affiliated with the Museo Latinoamericano remained in New York as residents past the 1970s, as time went on they tended to reinvent their lives as individuals each going his/her own way, and the phantom museum ceased to exist. Some took teaching jobs. Although blockbuster exhibitions of Latin American art continued in the 1980s and after with and without their inclusion, by then the sense of common purpose among artists was no longer an issue. But this may have had as much to do with the changing needs of artists seeking stability as they passed the age of 30, than to changing times.

How did they adapt as Latin American individuals in New York or the U.S.? And did they in any way feel marginalized? Camnitzer is especially well versed in how to move effortlessly from the margins to the mainstream and back. A permanent resident of the U.S. since 1964, he explains that rather than a homogenous entity, “Latin America” is a utopian concept. According to Camnitzer, the real Latin America is a multiplicity of forces, values and directions in which there is room for NAFTA and mainstreaming as well as for “independence” and “revolution.”²⁷ He admitted that his usage “Latin America” is mostly a utopian concept—a way of thinking that was shaped by the geographic specificity of the continent and the locatedness of its struggles against external enemies.²⁸ Yes! Consider that we don’t think of Europe in geographic terms but in cultural ones whereas the art of Latin America continues to be defined by geography. Camnitzer developed a way of reconciling who and what he is with where he is—in his case, New York. But this may be an individual matter not shared equally by all. I have

referred throughout specifically to Latin American nationals and not to the various groups within the U.S. since these groups are dissimilar in their experience with the U.S.

As a field of study, Latin American art in the U.S. has come a long way since the sixties not only through exhibitions but through universities like those represented in the “Transnational Latin American Art” forum of 2009 in addition to the University of New Mexico, NYU and the Institute in New York, the CUNY Graduate Center and several others where the subject is taught and who are producing record numbers of graduate students now working in the field as this forum demonstrates.

¹ Thomas M. Messer, as director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York in the mid 1960s, offers his view of the problem of national identities in the catalogue for the exhibition *Magnet New York* held at the Bonino Gallery (New York in 1964).

² The galleries where they exhibited also changed. Before 1968, artists such as the Argentines José Antonio Fernández Muro, Sara Grilo, Marcelo Bonevardi, Rogelio Polesello, Luis Felipe Noé among many, exhibited at mainstream galleries like the Bonino, Howard Wise, Bianchini Galleries, the Guggenheim Museum and the Center for Inter-American Relations, whereas the post 1968 generation were more apt to be shown at the Lerner-Heller, Cober, Zegri Galleries, some of which focused primarily on Latin Americans.

³ See Messer, Guggenheim Museum catalogue title page: “Prepared under the auspices of the Cornell University Latin American Year 1965-1966 and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

⁴ They were also shown at the Albright-Knox (Buffalo, 1965) and Farleigh Dickinson (Rutherford, N. J. in 1965). See my *Latin American Artists in the U.S. 1950-1970*, (Flushing, N.Y.: Godwin Ternbach Museum at Queens College, 1983), 7.

⁵ As the Inter-American Foundation for the Arts, this institution was government-sponsored and defined itself as “A private, non-profit foundation for the development of cultural exchange between the United States and Latin America” *Magnet: New York* (New York: Galeria Bonino, 1964), inside cover.

⁶ Robert M. Wool, *Magnet: New York*, unpaginated; also cited in Barnitz, *Latin American Artists in the U.S. 1950-1970*, 9.

⁷ Messer, *Magnet*.

⁸ A major traveling exhibition of Oiticica’s work shown in Minneapolis at the Walker Art Center in 1994 and several previous group exhibitions that included essays by Guy Brett helped put Oiticica on the international map. Oiticica died in Rio in 1980.

⁹ Luis Felipe Noé, “Does Art from Latin America Need a Passport?” in *Being America*, ed. by Rachel Weiss with Alan West (Fredonia: White Pine Press, 1991), 142-151.

¹⁰ Ironically the Argentine scholar Damián Bayón was responsible for proposing that title. Holiday Day & Hollister Sturges, curators and editors, *Art of the Fantastic*, (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum, 1989)

¹¹ Waldo Rasmussen, ed. *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth-Century*, (New York: MoMA, 1993).

¹² Lawrence Alloway, “Latin America and International Art,” *Art in America* (June 1965, parenthesis his), 64-77. Alloway left the Guggenheim over some disagreements before the completion of this exhibition. But his participation on juries of international exhibitions at the Instituto Torcuato di Tella in Buenos Aires, the Industrias Kaiser Bienals in Córdoba, and later the Coltejer bienal in Medellín, Colombia (1968-1972) gave

him considerable clout among specialists and Latin Americans. His attention to any particular artist immediately invested that artist with special status.

¹³ Thomas M. Messer, *The Emergent Decade* (1966), comments scattered as correspondence throughout the catalogue.

¹⁴ Scattered throughout the catalogue.

¹⁵ Said personally to the author.

¹⁶ These were in the words of Thomas Messer. See Messer, intro, *Fernandez-Muro*, Rome: Galleria Pogliani (1964).

¹⁷ She was included in *Magnet: New York*.

¹⁸ Florencio García Cisneros, *Forty Latin American Artists in New York* (Miami: Rema Press, 1964).

¹⁹ See Carlos Basualdo, *Helio Oiticica Quasi-Cinemas*, published as a catalogue (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2002). These were installations first done in the 1970s that combined participating artists and visitors, objects like pillows and film projections that confounded and merged the physical objects with the projected images.

²⁰ *Information*, 85 & 103. The Treaty of Tordecilhas led to a fictitious demarcation through what is now Brazil to separate Spanish from Portuguese colonial claims signed in 1494 by Pope Alexander VI.

²¹ Such as by Joseph Kosuth, Dennis Oppenheim, Richard Long, Bruce Naumann, and Yves Klein.

²² Luis Camnitzer, Rachel Weiss, ed. *On Art, Artists, Latin America, and Other Utopias* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2009). This book in its entirety addresses questions of packaging. An original way of presenting Latin American art generically was made by Mari Carmen Ramírez who as curator and editor avoided the traditional chronological approach on the premise that the absence of a legitimate history of Latin America made it possible to explain its art on its own terms. See exhibition catalogue *Inverted Utopias* (Houston: MFAH, 2004).

²³ See Lucy R. Lippard, "The dilemma. Prefatory Note" in *Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change*, (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1984), 2-10 and "The Art Workers' Coalition" reprinted in Gregory Battcock's *Idea Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1973), 102-115. Conceptualism in Latin American countries including *Tucumán Arde* is discussed in Mari Carmen Ramirez's essay, "Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960-1980," in the exhibition catalogue *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, directed by Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999), 53-71.

²⁴ *Contrabienal*, unpaginated. This volume in the form of a manuscript with a red cover, consists of a compilation of xeroxed statements dated from 1969 to 1971 accompanied by black and white illustrations by artists from Latin America as well as New York and was produced by the New York artists. It is difficult to know which bienal they were objecting to but judging by the date range of the statements, the artists were boycotting both the Bienals of 1969 and 1971.

²⁵ *Frente* (New York, March 2, 1971) "Plataforma," 1. The statement was signed by 34 artists that included some of the more mainstream ones like Luis Camnitzer, Cesar Paternosto, Liliana Porter, Alejandro Puente, and others.

²⁶ *Frente*, signed by 34 artists.

²⁷ Camnitzer, *On Art, Artists, Latin America and Other Utopias*, 94.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 5.

LA (RE)INVENCIÓN (GEO)ESTÉTICA DE AMÉRICA LATINA

De los 'Area Studies' a la geopolítica de los imaginarios museográficos

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Abstract

The global expansion of what is known as *new internationalism* promoted the establishment of a series of mutual conveniences as well as a collection of political tensions between Latin America and the international contemporary art system. Consequently, the 1990s saw not only the internationalization of the Latin American contemporary art, but also that which is considered Latin American or Latino as a strategic economic asset for the global market. Characterized as simultaneously peripheral, Western, fantastic, Europeanist, hyperrealist, revolutionary and calibanic, Latin America's amphibious cultural identity quickly transformed itself into a powerful emerging geoaesthetic region of which certain aesthetic values, differing from the merely fantastic or colorist, started to be evaluated economically. This paper focuses on the geoaesthetic and geoeconomic reinvention of Latin America, that is, in the interplays between the geopolitical dimension of the international art market and the rise of new regionalist understandings of some Latin American artistic practices. More precisely, in this paper I will address the manner in which some 'world-class' museums have included this strategic region within its museographic agendas. Describing what I call 'museographic imaginaries', in this paper I will also elaborate on the connections between the legacy of those academic departments known as *Area Studies* and the geographical, geocultural and geo-aesthetic stereotypification of the Latin America region within some Euroamerican progressive museums. Finally, I will describe the way in which the CIMAM (International Committee of ICOM for Museums and Collections of Modern Art) has been actively participating in the geopolitical remapping of the art world.

LA (RE)INVENCION DE AMÉRICA LATINA

'Area Studies', regiones geoestéticas y la geopolítica de los imaginarios museográficos

Joaquín Barriendos

Algunos museos de arte han comenzado a adaptar sus políticas adquisitivas y a reestructurar sus discursos museográficos con la idea de volver más coherente la relación entre el dibujo geopolítico de sus colecciones y la producción global de arte contemporáneo. Con la finalidad de reescribir la geografía histórica del arte moderno y contemporáneo estos museos se han dado a la tarea de cartografiar las actuales interacciones entre Occidente y lo que los *Area Studies* definieron como 'el resto del mundo'. Bajo la influencia de una tendencia historiográfica marcadamente postcolonialista, lo que estos nuevos imaginarios museográficos globales reclaman es su derecho a resarcir, a través de las instituciones del arte, las deudas geopolíticas que la modernidad ha erigido entre Occidente y aquellas regiones que parecían estar destinadas a circundar el desarrollo económico, cultural y estético de las potencias centrales. Por medio de la implementación de unas políticas transculturales de exhibición omnicomprensivas lo que estos museos intentan es, en suma, diluir las jerarquías de aquello que Immanuel Wallerstein ha definido como el sistema-mundo moderno.

El objetivo de este breve texto es señalar algunos de los dilemas decoloniales a los que se enfrentan en la actualidad este tipo de imaginarios museográficos, los cuales definiremos como progresistas o revisionistas. En la primera parte contextualizaré, desde el punto de vista de la teoría de la *transmodernidad* propuesta por el filósofo Enrique Dussel, lo que yo llamo el proceso de re-occidentalización del arte global. En la segunda, describiré la manera en la que algunos museos y algunas instituciones internacionales se han abocado recientemente a incluir a América Latina en el interior de sus agendas geopolíticas; en concreto, analizaré el imaginario museográfico del CIMAM (International Committee of ICOM for Museums and Collections of Modern Art) y la manera en la que dicho organismo ha participado activamente en el

remapeo geopolítico del arte global. A la luz de estos procesos de revisión geopolítica intentaré demostrar que aquello que hace sólo un par de décadas era considerado como un conjunto de representaciones estereotípicas de las geografías periféricas o no occidentales, en la actualidad circula dentro del sistema internacional del arte contemporáneo como un poderoso recurso ‘geoestético’. A este fenómeno nos referiremos como la reinención de América Latina en tanto que ‘activo-periferia’; es decir, su reintegración en el sistema internacional del arte bajo la forma de una ‘región geoestética emergente’ estratégica.¹

A lo largo de este texto vincularemos por lo tanto el concepto ‘regiones geoestéticas emergentes’ con la gestión de un conjunto de recursos económicos y de activos culturales relacionados con las periferias geográficas, con la gestión postcolonial de lo exótico y con los discursos en torno al ‘afuera’ epistémico/estético de Occidente.² La utilización de un lenguaje explícitamente ‘economicista’ a la hora de categorizar ciertas regiones geoestéticas en tanto que áreas *estratégicas* y *emergentes* para la reactivación de la producción, la exhibición y el consumo del arte contemporáneo tiene tres objetivos principales: 1) para establecer una relación directa entre el reforzamiento de los imaginarios regionales en el interior del capitalismo cognitivo global (*New Regionalism*), la financiarización y la coporativización transnacional de las economías emergentes (*Interdependent Markets Management*) y la aparición del nuevo internacionalismo (*New Internationalism*) en el sistema global del

¹ Desde el punto de vista de la economía cultural se puede decir que, en tanto que recursos simbólicos, los ‘activos-periferia’ sirven para capitalizar bienes y mercancías asociadas a lo marginal, lo periférico, lo maravilloso, lo no canónico, lo sólo parcialmente modernizado, lo geográficamente exótico, lo sistemáticamente subdesarrollado, lo económicamente dependiente, etcétera. El concepto ‘activo periferia’ es considerado aquí como una extensión transnacional (en el marco de las nuevas formas de asignación de valor de los intangibles) del concepto ‘activo-país’, el cual es entendido dentro del pensamiento macroeconómico como un conjunto de fortalezas y debilidades vinculadas a un país de origen, las cuales incorporan o sustraen valor a los bienes o mercancías y reposicionan marcas y mercados. Sobre el tema ver Barriandos, “Localizando lo idéntico / globalizando lo diverso. El ‘activo periferia’ en el mercado global del arte contemporáneo” en *Portal Iberoamericano de Gestión Cultural. Boletín de Gestión Cultural N° 12: Mercado del Arte Contemporáneo*, Junio, 2005, pp. 1-10.

² El concepto ‘región geoestética emergente’ lo he desarrollado más ampliamente en otro momento desde la óptica de la teoría decolonial asociándolo al análisis geopolítico y geoeconómico del sistema internacional del arte contemporáneo; sobre el tema ver Barriandos “Geopolitics of Global Art. The Reinvention of Latin America as a Geoesthetic Region” en Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg (Edits.), *The Global Art World. Audiences, Markets and Museums*, Hatje-Cantz, Ostfildern, 2009. Sobre las categorías geoestéticas del sistema internacional del arte contemporáneo ver Barriandos, *Geoestética y Transculturalidad. La globalización de la diversidad cultural y la internacionalización del arte contemporáneo*, Fundación Espais de l’Art Conemporarni, Girona, 2007.

arte contemporáneo al comienzo de la década de los noventa; 2) para enfatizar los mutuos endeudamientos entre la irrupción de la geografía del arte contemporáneo de la segunda posguerra y la difusión de algunas teorías económicas marcadamente occidentalistas como lo es el desarrollismo económico (*Developmentalism*), la teoría de la dependencia (*Dependency Theory*), la teoría del crecimiento económico desigual (*Uneven Development*) o la teoría del subdesarrollo sistemático del Tercer Mundo (*Parallel Modernization Theory*); y, finalmente, 3) para remarcar la influencia y la importancia que han tenido los *think tanks* académicos diseminados por el campo interdisciplinario conocido como los *Area Studies* en las configuraciones asimétricas postcoloniales y en las jerarquías estéticas y geopolíticas del actual sistema internacional del arte contemporáneo por una parte así como en la indirecta reoccidentalización de algunas áreas de especialización geopolíticamente ‘revisionistas’ tales como los *World Art Studies*, los *Transnational Post-colonial Studies*, los *Transcultural/Intercultural Aesthetic Studies*, la *Comparative Art History*, o los *Cross-Cultural Art Studies* por la otra.

I El nuevo revisionismo geopolítico de los museos occidentales

La década de los noventa vio florecer una serie de fenómenos urbanos globales los cuales modificaron de manera sustancial la geografía económica y las relaciones simbólicas del sistema internacional del arte contemporáneo. Resumidos en cuatro puntos, estos fenómenos podrían enumerarse de la siguiente manera: 1) la masificación del turismo cultural; 2) la mundialización de los museos de arte; 3) la bienalización del sistema internacional de exhibiciones y 4) la corporativización transnacional del arte contemporáneo. En un sentido amplio de la expresión, puede decirse que estos fenómenos no sólo transformaron la manera en la que los museos entendían el escenario internacional del arte sino también la manera en la que se veían a sí mismos como instituciones internacionales. A pesar de que el porcentaje de arte contemporáneo no occidental adquirido por los museos durante las últimas

décadas sigue siendo bajísimo, conceptos tales como lo periférico, lo no occidental, lo internacional y lo global tienen hoy un significado radicalmente distinto al que tenían hace sólo un par de décadas.

En una medida o en otra, estas transformaciones obligaron a los museos de arte contemporáneo a repensar su función social, su legitimidad histórica y su futuro institucional desde una perspectiva global. En consecuencia, los museos de arte contemporáneo se han venido cuestionando el tipo de geografía histórica del arte de la que hablaban sus colecciones, sus discursos curatoriales y sus actividades pedagógicas; es decir, han puesto en tela de juicio el ‘mapa geoestético’ con el que había trabajado el museo moderno/colonial. De tales cuestionamientos surgió una actitud museográfica progresista que podría definirse como geopolíticamente revisionista, la cual oscila entre la reforma y la refundación de la institución museo.

Desde el punto de vista de la tradición museográfica occidental, estas actitudes autocríticas supusieron sin lugar a dudas un cambio muy positivo. No obstante, tanto la pretensión de generar nuevos mapas geoestéticos acordes con el discurso de la postcolonialidad como la perspectiva de borrar las distancias geopolíticas entre los centros y las periferias parecen dejar sin respuesta la siguiente pregunta: ¿a partir de qué tipo de tradición estética de la modernidad se pretende validar la inclusión de las geografías periféricas del arte en el interior del canon occidental?

II *El ‘giro decolonial’: más allá de las ‘otras modernidades’*

Desde el terreno de lo que se conoce como el *giro decolonial*,³ el filósofo latinoamericano Enrique Dussel ha descrito la modernidad como un sistema constituido por dos paradigmas distintos: el Paradigma Eurocéntrico de la Modernidad y el Paradigma Mundial de la modernidad/Alteridad. Desde su

³ Sobre el ‘giro decolonial’ ver Castro-Gómez, Grosfoguel (Edit.) *El giro decolonial. Reflexiones para una diversidad epistémica más allá del capitalismo global*, Instituto Pensar; Siglo del Hombre Editores; IESCO, Bogotá (2007); Grosfoguel, “The Epistemic Decolonial Turn” en *Cultural Studies*, Volume 21, Numbers 2-3, March 2007, pp. 211-223(13).

punto de vista, sólo el segundo reconoce las relaciones jerárquicas entre el ‘nosotros’ y el ‘los otros’; entre Occidente y el resto del mundo; entre la epistemología eurocentrada y los saberes periféricos. Para Dussel, por lo tanto, sólo en el Paradigma Mundial de la Modernidad/Alteridad se hace explícito un tipo de occidentalización de los saberes inaugurado por el colonialismo trasatlántico. A partir de esta descripción del sistema mundo moderno/colonial, la propuesta decolonial de Dussel consiste en reconducir el segundo paradigma hacia lo que él denomina la *transmodernidad*; es decir, no sólo hacia el reconocimiento de modernidades *otras* (o hacia el reconocimiento de saberes *otros* diferentes a aquellos que la modernidad eurocentrada consideró como universales) sino hacia la aceptación de la inminente necesidad de tender hacia la restitución inter-epistémica entre culturas que llevan a cuevas diferentes procesos históricos de modernización o percepciones antagónicas respecto a las herencias geo-epistemológicas de la modernidad. En este sentido, tanto la teoría de la *transmodernidad* como la teoría decolonial en su conjunto deben ser consideradas como un verdadero *giro geoepistemológico*.⁴

Si se asume el paradigma de la *transmodernidad* en toda su dimensión crítica, resulta evidente que ni la globalidad, ni la postmodernidad, ni la postcolonialidad pueden concebirse como la superación efectiva del régimen de colonialidad inaugurado por la modernidad imperial europea. Es por esta razón por lo que teóricos como Aníbal Quijano, Ramón Grosfoguel, Santiago Castro-Gómez y Walter Dignolo han hablado de la *colonialidad del poder*⁵ como una matriz estructural presente en nuestros días, la cual resistió no sólo al proceso de descolonización administrativa de los territorios coloniales, sino también al proceso de ‘postcolonización’ de tres de las instituciones en las que se materializó la Historia (occidental) del arte (moderno/colonial): la universidad, el archivo y el museo. Frente a esta descolonización inconclusa de estas

⁴ Enrique Dussel “Europa, modernidad y eurocentrismo” en Edgardo Lander (edit.), *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas latinoamericanas*, Buenos Aires, CLASCO, 2000; Dussel (2002), ‘World System and “Transmodernity”’, *Nepantla. Views from South*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 221-244.

⁵ El concepto ‘colonialidad del poder’ fue propuesto por el teórico peruano Aníbal Quijano. Al respecto puede consultarse Quijano, “Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad” en *Perú Indígena*, vol. 13, no. 29, Lima, 1992. Ramón Grosfoguel define el concepto de la siguiente manera: “Quijano conceptualizó la colonialidad del poder como una imbricación ... de jerarquías globales múltiples y heterogéneas ... donde la jerarquía racial/étnica de la línea divisoria europeo/no europeo reconfigura de manera transversal todas las demás estructuras globales de poder”.

instituciones, la pregunta que debemos hacernos es entonces la siguiente:
¿Cómo se manifiesta la matriz de *colonialidad del poder* en aquellas políticas museográficas y archivísticas que abogan por la eliminación de las jerarquías geopolíticas entre los centros y las periferias del sistema internacional del arte?

III *La reinención de América Latina como región geoestética emergente*

La expansión global del *nuevo internacionalismo* propició que entre América Latina y el sistema internacional del arte contemporáneo se establecieran una serie de mutuas conveniencias así como también un conjunto de nuevas tensiones geopolíticas. Como he intentado explicar en otro momento, durante la década de los noventa no sólo se internacionalizó el arte contemporáneo de América Latina sino también *lo latinoamericano* o *lo latino* en tanto que un activo económico estratégico para el mercado global.⁶ Caracterizada por ser al mismo tiempo periférica, occidental, fantástica, europeísta, hiperrealista, revolucionaria y ‘calibánica’, la anfibia identidad cultural de América Latina se convirtió rápidamente en una potente región geoestética emergente, de la cual comenzaron a valorarse rasgos estéticos diferentes a los propiamente ‘fantásticos’ o coloristas; es decir, su radicalidad político-conceptual, sus neoconcretismos, sus geometrismos abstractos, sus experimentaciones antibarrocas y sus neoconceptualismos poéticos.⁷ Esta es la razón por la cual la circulación global de algunas piezas emblemáticas de aquello que algunos teóricos han insistido en llamar los conceptualismos ideológicos (Marchán Fiz), los conceptualismos calientes (Pastor Mellado) o los conceptualismos de contextualización (Luis Camnitzer) ha propiciado, paradójicamente, una suerte de reforzamiento o reinención de la identidad regional de América Latina. Puede decirse entonces que hacia la mitad de la década de los noventa *lo latinoamericano* operaba ya dentro del sistema internacional del arte contemporáneo como un nuevo activo geoestético o ‘activo-periferia’.

⁶ Barriendos, “Localizando lo idéntico...”, *op. cit.*

⁷ La gestión de lo fantástico ha sido un tema de debate en lo que se refiere al mercado del arte latinoamericano en los noventa; sobre el tema ver: Ramírez, “Beyond ‘the Fantastic’: Framing Identity in US Exhibitions of Latin American Art” en: *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America*. Edited by Gerardo Mosquera. London: Institute of international Visual Arts, 1995, pp. 229-246.

Para explicar a qué nos referimos con la idea de la reinención de la región latinoamericana a través de los mercados globales del arte conviene citar las palabras del economista Jill Kreps: “en nuestros días, la categoría arte latinoamericano depende de la región latinoamericana pero gana interés gracias a la existencia de compradores estadounidenses. Los inversores de este país se interesarían más por categorías como arte ruso, arte indio y arte chino si pudieran diversificar el riesgo de sus portafolios y si pudieran también aumentar su fortaleza y sus beneficios específicos, de la misma manera que lo hacen con la categoría arte latinoamericano”; otra cita, esta vez de Mary Anne Martin, fundadora de la división de Arte Latinoamericano de Sotheby’s y miembro del Comité de Selección de Art Basel Miami Beach, nos ayudan por su parte a entender cómo opera en la actualidad el capital simbólico de lo latinoamericano en el sistema internacional del arte contemporáneo: “el mercado del arte latinoamericano no existía hace veintiún años; no quiero decir que las obras de algunos artistas latinoamericanos no se vendieran en diferentes mercados, sino que no eran comerciadas a través de una categoría de coleccionismo regional ... yo estoy segura que este interés inmenso por lo latinoamericano no existiría si las subastas no hubieran arrojado luz sobre el arte de esta vasta región a partir de la construcción de un común, pero no homogéneo, nuevo patrimonio ... la idea del ver al arte latinoamericano horizontalmente a través de ejes nacionales en lugar de verlo verticalmente país por país ha marcado desde luego una forma de hacer en el mercado. Esto ha ocurrido además en un momento muy oportuno, impeliendo un nuevo aire al mercado global, el cual ansiaba ser redefinido”.⁸

Para explicar por otra parte a qué nos referimos con la idea de la reinención de *lo latinoamericano* en tanto que un ‘activo-periferia’, vale la pena citar las palabras de Mari Carmen Ramírez, fundadora del ICCA (Centro Internacional para las Artes de las Américas del Museo de Bellas Artes de Houston), “La ganancia nunca está asegurada. Pero, si desde nuestro arte, cobramos conciencia de esa perspectiva privilegiada que nos dan los 360° del ‘afuera’ de

⁸ Mary Anne Martin (1998), *The Latin American Market Comes of Age* Martin, Mary-Anne. Citada la página Mary-Anne Martin Fine Art Web Site <http://www.mamfa.com/articles/index.html>

la periferia, tal vez podamos pescar en y el momento preciso [...] Tomémoslo en cuenta, sobre todo en el sentido marginal de muchos de sus artistas quienes cáusticamente no sólo fueron obliterados en su momento generacional por diversas modas sino que, de manera innegable, o vendieron poquísimo o nunca tuvieron mercado”.⁹ Asociando tres niveles de perifericidad de las neovanguardias latinoamericanas (el mercadológico, el geopolítico y el discursivo) la apuesta de algunos museos como el MFAH (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston) parece ser entonces la de criticar aquellos modelos expositivos que, en palabras de la propia Mari Carmen Ramírez, “pretenden cancelar lo único que ... brinda [a los latinoamericanos] respeto en los centros legitimadores: la precedencia asombrosa, la transformación radical, la diferencia incuestionable”.¹⁰ Como puede verse, lo que da forma a *lo latinoamericano* en tanto que un nuevo ‘activo-periferia’ en este tipo de lecturas neorregionalistas es la suposición de que en América Latina existe una profunda politización radical del arte, una cercana convivencia con lo fantástico y una auténtica marginalidad identitaria.

Ahora bien, de cara a comprender las nuevas relaciones entre la economía simbólica del *arte global* y el revisionismo geopolítico de los museos de arte, el proceso de reinención de América Latina en tanto que una región geoestética emergente estratégica nos obliga a hacernos las siguientes preguntas: ¿De qué tipo de argumentos geopistemológicos se ha valido un organismo como el CIMAM a la hora de incluir a América Latina en sus imaginarios museográficos? ¿Qué tipo de remanentes dejaron los enfoques geopolíticos de los así llamados *Area Studies* en los procesos de reformulación de los mapas geoestéticos y en el de los imaginarios museográficos de organismos como el CIMAM? ¿El revisionismo geopolítico del CIMAM revierte o más bien alimenta el carácter periférico de *lo latinoamericano*? Y, finalmente, ¿Qué se requiere para que los museos de arte operen como un verdadero contrapeso geopolítico respecto a los procesos de acumulación de

⁹ Ramírez, “Nuevos modelos de exposiciones de arte latinoamericano del Siglo XXI: Impacto y Eficacia” mesa de debate celebrada el 20 de Mayo de 2005 y publicada como artículo en: *Circuitos Latinoamericanos/Circuitos Internacionales. Interacción, roles y perspectivas*, Buenos Aires, arteBA Fundación, 2006, pp. 42-43.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

aquellos capitales simbólicos generados por la aparición de las regiones geoestéticas emergentes en el sistema internacional del arte?

IV El CIMAM y la expansión del revisionismo geoestético occidental

El CIMAM (International Committee of ICOM for Museum and Collections of Modern Art) es uno de los treinta comités internacionales a través de los cuales opera en la actualidad el ICOM (International Council of Museums). Como puede leerse en su sitio web, el CIMAM se concibe a sí mismo como “the only international body devoted exclusively to Museums and Collections of Modern Art”. El objetivo central del comité ejecutivo es “To establish CIMAM as THE organisation for the discussion of philosophical, ethical and practical questions relating to the running and development of Museums and Galleries of Modern and Contemporary Art worldwide”. Una de las actividades centrales del CIMAM consiste en celebrar un ‘General Meeting’ temático el cual se realiza cada año en una ciudad distinta. El objetivo de estos encuentros es “To provide an international forum for discussion and to anticipate and discuss new developments in contemporary art and theory [...] To promote the dissemination of knowledge and information about modern and contemporary art [...] To uphold and define good practice and professional standards in Museums and Galleries of Modern Art and other related bodies”.¹¹

En tanto que entidad internacional, el CIMAM nació con la pretensión de abarcar la geografía mundial del arte moderno (y contemporáneo). Sin embargo, no fue sino hacia el final de la década de los noventa que el CIMAM comenzó a desarrollar un espíritu más globalista y a revisar sus políticas internacionales. El resultado de este revisionismo ha quedado plasmado en la ratificación y expansión de sus estatutos, en los cuales se hacen explícitos los siguientes tres objetivos: 1) incluir a las regiones periféricas dentro sus diseños geopolíticos; 2) representar la diversidad global en su estructura interna; 3)

¹¹ Todos los extractos citados en este artículo relativos al CIMAM han sido tomados de su sitio web; ver: <<<http://www.cimam.org/about/about1.php>>> visitada en octubre de 2009.

proyectarse como institución a escala global.¹² En lo que respecta al primer punto, el presidente del CIMAM, David Elliot, declaró en el año 2000 la necesidad de: “to make CIMAM more international and to stimulate membership in non-western countries”. El Comité Ejecutivo recordó a su vez en la misma reunión “the intention of adding one significant Latin American patron to the Patrons of CIMAM”. En 2005, Alfred Pacquement, quien fue director del CIMAM entre 2004 y 2007, declaró por su parte lo siguiente: “One of the first discussions of the new board was to decide where the annual conference would take place. We immediately thought of Latin American because of the very interesting developments in artistic creation in this part of the world and also of its many new museums”.¹³

Como puede verse, el CIMAM se ha abocado desde el año 2000 a corregir las jerarquías geopolíticas del arte moderno y a diseñar nuevos circuitos internacionales y regionales para el arte contemporáneo. No es extraño por lo tanto que dedique en la actualidad gran parte de sus esfuerzos y presupuestos a expandir los horizontes geopolíticos del ICOM hacia América Latina.¹⁴ El *Srategic Plan 2008-2010* del ICOM, titulado *Our Global Vision*, es entonces el resultado de la nueva actitud geopolíticamente aperturista que algunos de los International Committees como el CIMAM y algunas de las *Regional Alliances* del ICOM han venido promoviendo desde el año 2000. Como ejemplo de lo anterior baste citar el cuarto punto de los ‘Anticipated Results’ de dicho Plan en los cuales el ICOM se propone “Make specific efforts to establish strategic alliances with organizations and institutions in geographic areas where ICOM

¹² Sus estatutos, llamados ‘Rules and Regulations’, fueron revisados en 1999 y ratificados en 2003, 2005 y 2007.

¹³ La primera vez que el CIMAM hizo explícita la necesidad de incluir a América Latina dentro de su geografía institucional fue en el año 2000. A partir de entonces se hizo evidente que dicho subcontinente se había convertido en una región geoestética emergente estratégica para el revisionismo geopolítico de los museos de arte en Occidente. En el Board Meeting del año 2000, por ejemplo, el Comité Ejecutivo había planteado lo siguiente: “An American location should be sought for 2003; one suggestion was San Francisco but a Latin American location should also be considered”. En el Board Meeting de 2002, una vez más, se planteó la siguiente preocupación: “Where next? It was strongly felt that the 2005 Conference should be located in a city in Europe [...] 2006 should be somewhere in Latin America: both Mexico and Sao Paulo were mentioned but as CIMAM had already visited Mexico, Sao Paulo was preferred”.

¹⁴ Hay que recordar que el ICOM se fundó en París en 1946, en un contexto sociocultural en el que las relaciones geopolíticas internacionales estaban marcadas por el desarrollo de la guerra y por la fermentación de las estructuras geoepistemológicas que dieron forma a sistema bipolar entre centros y periferias industriales, entre regiones desarrolladas y regiones subdesarrolladas, entre el Primer y el Tercer Mundos.

is underrepresented, such as Latin-America and Africa”, o el primer punto, en el cual se aboga por “Identify and develop the tools required to communicate across ICOM’s geographically diverse constituencies about the full range of work and issues being pursued”. En lo que respecta al coleccionismo transnacional y a las políticas adquisitivas globales, el ICOM promueve a su vez acciones tales como “Embed ICOM’s cross-cultural approach locally and globally, through promotion of cultural diversity of collections and expressions of knowledge”. En lo que al papel específico del CIMAM se refiere, la propia directora del ICOM, Alissandra Cummins, declaró en 2005 que el “ICOM relies on CIMAM for its invaluable support in debating and disseminating within the modern and contemporary art community, our organisation’s values; among which, the appreciation and protection of cultural diversity based on the sound application of ICOM’s Code of Ethics for Museums, is particularly germane”.¹⁵

Como se deduce de estos objetivos estratégicos, la reestructuración geopolítica del CIMAM en particular —y del ICOM en general— está profundamente vinculada a la aparición de los nuevos regionalismos culturales así como también a la reificación del discurso de la diversidad cultural, al encumbramiento de la razón intercultural en los discursos internacionalistas del sistema global del arte y a la promoción del consumo y el disfrute transnacional de aquel tipo de arte contemporáneo definido por su atractivo local, nacional y, sobre todo, regional. En este sentido, el revisionismo geopolítico del CIMAM debe entenderse a la luz del surgimiento de nuevas áreas estéticas de influencia definidas regionalmente por el mercado del arte: arte contemporáneo de los países del Este, arte contemporáneo del mundo asiático, arte contemporáneo latinoamericano, arte chicano, etc. Consciente de estar alimentando este tipo de ambigüedades geopolíticas producidas por la nueva geografía económica del capitalismo cognitivo global, el CIMAM abordó en 2005 el tema de la geopolítica de los saberes y lo hizo además, como veremos a continuación, a través de un gesto estratégico de deslocalización hacia América Latina.

¹⁵ Todas las citas relativas al ICOM han sido tomadas del *Strategic Plan 2008-2010*, el cual puede consultarse online en: http://icom.museum/strat_plan.html

V CIMAM-São Paulo 2005:

La expansión estratégica del revisionismo geopolítico

Bajo el título, *Museums: Intersections in a Global Scene. The art museum and the geopolitics of knowledge with a focus on the Latin-American context*, el General Meeting del CIMAM se llevó a cabo en Sao Paulo en noviembre de 2005. Era la primera vez que una de las reuniones plenarias del CIMAM se realizaba en América Latina y la tercera desde 1946 que el ICOM (International Council of Museums) se trasladaba a dicho continente para desarrollar ahí una de sus asambleas generales.¹⁶ Este encuentro persiguió tres objetivos muy concretos y sin duda relevantes: 1) el papel del museo en la construcción de narraciones politizadas de la historia; 2) la necesidad de ir más allá de la mera gestión y transmisión del conocimiento; 3) lo ‘colonial’ como punto de partida para pensar el museo global. Para alcanzar estos objetivos, el comité invitó a 21 destacados teóricos, curadores y profesionales de museos, entre los que se encontraban algunos de los enfoques más agudos de la crítica institucional actual (Brian Holmes, Mauricio Lazzarato, Suely Rolnik), así como también algunos de los postulados más críticos con el *nuevo internacionalismo* (Vasif Kortun) y algunos enfoques explícitamente antioccidentalistas (Walter Mignolo) y antieurocéntricos (Ana Longoni). Los contenidos del encuentro fueron, desde cualquier punto de vista que se le vea, una contribución muy importante en lo que al papel del museo en la era del internacionalismo expandido se refiere.

Desde nuestro punto de vista, sin embargo, la inercia del revisionismo geopolítico del CIMAM no parece haberse apartado en *São Paulo* de la tendencia de enfatizar —aunque sea de manera afirmativa— al carácter periférico y marginal de *lo latinoamericano*. La razón que nos conduce a afirmar esto es que, debido a la paradoja geoestética del *arte global* a la que nos hemos referido antes, entre más ‘geográficamente’ abarcadora se pretende una institución global, más ‘periféricas’ se vuelven las regiones geográficas de

¹⁶ El ICOM se había reunido en la Ciudad de México en 1980 y en Buenos Aires en 1986. Entre esta última fecha y la celebración del encuentro general del CIMAM en Brasil en 2005 transcurrieron por lo tanto prácticamente veinte años durante los cuales América Latina no fue concebida como un área estratégica para la reflexión en torno a la geografía global de las instituciones museísticas.

las que se vale para justificar su determinación de abanderar el diseño de una nueva geostética incluyente y omnicomprensiva. Nuestro argumento puede entonces definirse de la siguiente manera: entre más legítimamente ‘periférica’ es aquella región que se pretende incluir en el nuevo imaginario museográfico de los museos de arte, mayor legitimidad ‘global’ adquieren el revisionismo geopolítico y los diseños geoestéticos de los museos o de las instituciones progresistas. A esto a lo que nos referimos con el encumbramiento de la razón intercultural en el sistema internacional del arte contemporáneo. Como puede verse, en medio de esta paradoja geopolítica lo periférico tiende a acentuarse debido al desplazamiento simbólico del centro, pero no a su disolución.

Al haberse valido de América Latina para expandir su aperturismo geopolítico, lo que el CIMAM consiguió en 2005 fue por lo tanto remarcar el carácter estratégico de *lo latinoamericano* en tanto que una región geoestética emergente. Una de las consecuencias inmediatas de esta paradoja es la reactivación del valor de cambio de *lo latinoamericano* en tanto que un ‘activo-periferia’ en el mercado global. En consecuencia, los mutuos pero jerárquicos endeudamientos geoepistemológicos entre el carácter central del CIMAM y la función periférica de América Latina nos obligan a preguntarnos, una vez más, por el asunto de quién tiene la autoridad no sólo para incluir a los otros sino también para corregir los errores tanto de la geografía histórica como de la imaginación geopolítica de la modernidad occidental; en última instancia, de lo que nos habla el revisionismo geopolítico del CIMAM respecto a América Latina es del problema de la *colonialidad del saber*: quién tiene la legitimidad para invertir no sólo el curso de la historia de la modernidad occidental sino también, junto con ella, el de sus jerarquías geoestéticas.

La pregunta que debemos hacernos a la luz de estas contradicciones geoepistemológicas es entonces la siguiente: ¿hacia dónde parece dirigirse el revisionismo geopolítico del CIMAM? Si consideramos que su pretensión, como afirman sus estatutos, es la de convertirse en *LA* institución que ha de comandar las reflexiones sobre los asuntos de globales de los museos de arte, la respuesta no es difícil de encontrar: hacia un tipo de aperturismo geopolítico

ciertamente crítico y autorreflexivo, pero que se inscribe en los procesos de reoccidentalización de las nuevas instituciones e imaginarios globales. El propio CIMAM parece ser consciente de vivir inmerso en la contradicción global de su propio revisionismo geopolítico. En Viena, en 2007, su comité ejecutivo declaró al respecto lo siguiente: “Still too Eurocentric in its roots, the new board is extremely receptive to other sensibilities and realities, such as the ones in Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe as well as Africa. The need to broaden CIMAM’s membership to those areas is one of its objectives”.

En consecuencia, el dilema geopolítico de un organismo como el CIMAM no parece ser cómo deslocalizar las grandes preguntas de los museos en torno al arte global sino, más bien, cómo hacer que este tipo de debates teóricos sirvan para abrir una nueva era de agenciamientos sociales en la que los museos de arte contemporáneo se vuelvan una pieza activa con una presencia e influencia plenamente globales pero sin que por ello se vuelvan entidades inconscientes del peso de la nueva geografía económica y simbólica del sistema internacional del arte contemporáneo. En suma, sus retos inmediatos parecen apuntar hacia la generación de estrategias que eviten que los museos de arte se conviertan en productores globales de nuevos imaginarios museográficos pensados para satisfacer las necesidades históricas y para remendar las deudas geoestéticas de Occidente.

En mi opinión, hay tres puntos medulares que los museos de arte deben considerar a cabalidad si es que su pretensión es la de superar las contradicciones geopolíticas, geoestéticas y geoeconómicas que acabamos de mencionar a partir de describir el caso de *lo latinoamericano* y el CIMAM. Primero, la falta de una respuesta bien fundada a las preguntas *por quién, desde dónde y cómo* es que la representación de las regiones estéticas periféricas ha ido ganado reconocimiento como parte de la nueva geografía del arte contemporáneo; segundo, el hecho de que el marco tradicional de legitimación del museo moderno/colonial parece seguir existiendo sin contradicción en el interior de los actuales imaginarios museográficos progresistas; y, finalmente, el reconocimiento de que es imposible alcanzar un diálogo geoestético

verdaderamente horizontal entre regiones culturales con modernidades diferenciales cuando algunas de ellas permanecen geo-epistemológicamente y geo-económicamente jerarquizadas por la imaginación geopolítica de la modernidad. En suma, el revisionismo museográfico progresista necesita desligarse y cuestionar el *locus* occidental de enunciación. Su punto de partida no puede limitarse a la simple eliminación del diseño geopolítico del sistema-mundo moderno; en su lugar, lo que debería procurar es más bien alcanzar un estado de transmodernidad, es decir, un escenario en el que se sustituya lo que la teoría decolonial denomina el sistema-mundo moderno/colonial. Si los museos de arte no asumen un punto de partida radicalmente desoccidentalizador como nuevo locus de enunciación, su revisionismo geopolítico terminará por general nuevos endeudamientos simbólicos y epistémicos entre las así llamadas regiones occidentales y las no occidentales; endeudamientos que, como ya hemos dicho, se traducen en nuevos capitales simbólicos y nuevos ‘activos-periferia’ para ser explotados en el mercado del arte global.

LA (RE)INVENCION (GEO)ESTÉTICA DE AMÉRICA LATINA
De los 'Area Studies' a la geopolítica de los imaginarios museográficos

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Latin American cultural networks and the debates on revolutionary art (1970-1973)

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Abstract

Towards 1970, the idea of Latin America as a space of common identification extended all over the continent giving rise to several cultural networks. Those networks responded to a series of common frameworks that, in general, we can include under the “theory of dependency”. One of these networks was strengthened by Cuba and Chile after the triumph of Salvador Allende at the Chilean presidential elections of September 1970.

These cultural connections were inserted in a wider program of bilateral initiatives that arose as a result of reestablished diplomatic relations between both countries. For Cuba this also implied a new and concrete possibility to articulate a continental political front. So, by 1971 Havana-Santiago strengthen an artistic-cultural axis with the aim of projecting a Latinamericanist proposal in the continent. The central idea of this alliance sought to articulate an anti-imperialist artistic front.

With this aim the Institute of Latin American Art (College of Fine Arts, University of Chile) and the Cuban House of the Americas programmed the First Meeting of Latin American Art (held at La Havana, in May 1972). Conceived as the first of a series of meetings destined to think about the role of the revolutionary artist in Latin America, it also represented an instance that wove true chains of commitment, as well as artistic and ideological solidarity that were abruptly interrupted by the sucesive military coups that burst in into the Latin American scene during the Seventies.

Transnational Latin American Art

International Research Forum for Graduate Students and Emerging Scholars
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Las redes culturales latinoamericanas y los debates del arte revolucionario (1970-1973)¹

No se trata de reunirnos para discutir de arte, sino de la revolución latinoamericana, de que nuestros pueblos sean libres y de que la cultura sea un arma eficaz.

Régulo Pérez, 1973 ²

El arte es una forma de concebir al mundo y la revolución es la única forma de concebir a América Latina.

Luis Felipe Noé, 1971 ³

Posiblemente sean contados los momentos de la historia en que la palabra “revolución” adquiere un grado de inminencia tal como el que se experimentó en América Latina a principios de los años setenta. En poco más de diez años, el continente había sido testigo del surgimiento de dos propuestas revolucionarias vinculadas a la política de izquierda.⁴

Más allá de las distintas coyunturas locales diversos proyectos nacionales fueron pensados en este sentido, desde aquellos más tangibles como el de la Revolución Cubana o el de

¹ Inscripto en el marco de mi tesis doctoral, el escrito es una versión parcial del capítulo “La inserción de los artistas en el ámbito local y latinoamericano. Dos visiones sobre la cultura oficial”. Dirigida por la Dra. Andrea Giunta, la tesis *Discursos de resistencia. Tácticas simbólicas e itinerarios del arte argentino, 1973-1983* se encuentra radicada en la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la Universidad de Buenos Aires.

² Declaración del artista venezolano en Carlos Piñero Loredó, “Artes Plásticas y lucha revolucionaria –mesa redonda–”, La Habana, Prensa Latina/Centro de estudios Socialistas Salvador de la Plaza, 1972.

³ Luis Felipe Noé, “El Arte de América Latina es la Revolución” (Manifiesto), en Noé. *El Arte de América Latina es la Revolución*, Santiago de Chile, Instituto de Arte Latinoamericano- Andrés Bello, 1971, p. 33.

⁴ La revolución cubana en 1959 y la vía pacífica al socialismo chilena en 1970.

la Unidad Popular (UP) en Chile, hasta aquellos no concretados como el de la Argentina tras el triunfo de Héctor J. Cámpora en las elecciones presidenciales de 1973. En el campo de la cultura surgieron debates que pensaron nuevas alternativas de vincular arte y sociedad, y las formas más eficaces para insertarlas dentro de los renovados proyectos nacionales.

Hacia 1970, la idea de América Latina como un espacio de identificación común se extendía por el continente dando lugar al surgimiento de nuevos vínculos culturales. Los mismos respondían a una serie de ideales comunes que, en términos generales, podemos englobar bajo el ala de la “teoría de la dependencia”. Una de estas redes fue afianzada por Cuba y Chile tras el triunfo del socialista Salvador Allende en las elecciones presidenciales chilenas de septiembre de 1970.⁵

El polo socialista latinoamericano

En junio de 1971, se anunció “la realización de una bienal Chileno –Cubana de pintura, grabado y dibujo a realizarse en agosto simultáneamente en ambos países...”.⁶ Se trataba del primer paso para la concreción de un encuentro entre artistas plásticos latinoamericanos orientado a integrar proyectos y acciones entre la isla y el continente. Con el auspicio y la organización del Instituto de Arte Latinoamericano de la Facultad de Bellas Artes de Universidad de Chile (IAL) y la Casa de las Américas de La Habana,⁷ estos vínculos culturales

⁵ El 4 de noviembre Salvador Allende accedía a la presidencia chilena tras una victoria que, lejos de ser arrolladora, debió sortear fuertes negociaciones para que el Congreso lo ratificara en la Moneda. En los cincuenta días que mediaron entre las elecciones de septiembre y la toma del gobierno, la Unidad Popular debió enfrentar presiones políticas internas y externas que incluyeron “sabotaje económico, pánico financiero organizado, terrorismo, asesinato individual, maniobras y negociación política...”, cfr. Regis Debray, “Allende habla con Debray”, *Punto Final*, Santiago, año V, n° 126, 16 de marzo de 1971, p.20.

⁶ En Buenos Aires la revista *Los Libros* se hizo eco de esta convocatoria, cfr. Américo Juan Castilla, “Bienal Chileno–Cubana”, *Los Libros*, año 2, n° 20, junio 1971, pp.12-13.

⁷ Concebida como un espacio de difusión y diálogo, Casa de las Américas fue creada en 1959, pocos meses después del triunfo de la Revolución Cubana, con el objetivo de “...desarrollar y ampliar las relaciones socioculturales con los pueblos de la América Latina, el Caribe y el resto del mundo”, véase Claudia Gilman, *Entre la pluma y el fusil. Debates y dilemas del escritor revolucionario en América Latina*, Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI, 2003, pp. 78,80-81.

se insertaban dentro de un programa más vasto de iniciativas bilaterales que surgieron como consecuencia del restablecimiento de las relaciones diplomáticas entre ambos países.⁸

Una determinación de esta índole obligó, entre otras cuestiones, a un realineamiento de la política exterior chilena principalmente respecto al acuerdo con la Organización de los Estados Americanos (OEA), el Tratado Interamericano de Asistencia Recíproca (TIAR), y del pacto militar que mantenía con Estados Unidos.⁹ Si por un lado los vínculos con Cuba debilitaban la posición Chilena en el mapa internacional, por otro lado entre La Habana y Santiago comenzó a cobrar importancia la formación de un eje “tercermundista” o “no alineado”, “... una constelación [que] emergería en el mundo latinoamericano, que operaría como un ariete contra los intereses de Washington y de los Estados Unidos y de los estados más conservadores o en resumidas cuentas, contra la legitimidad del sistema.”¹⁰ A los ojos de Fidel, con el ingreso de Chile a la constelación del socialismo latinoamericano se abrían para Cuba posibilidades concretas de articular un frente antiimperialista en el continente.

Por su parte, con el triunfo de la Unidad Popular se abrió un novedoso panorama cultural donde las brigadas muralistas tuvieron una importante presencia en la vida política chilena.¹¹

⁸ En un mensaje dirigido al pueblo chileno en noviembre de 1970, el Presidente Salvador Allende comunica la resolución de “reanudar las relaciones diplomáticas, consulares, comerciales y culturales con la República de Cuba”, cfr. “Primer Mensaje del Presidente Allende ante el Congreso Pleno 21 de mayo de 1971- La vía chilena al socialismo- Parte Segunda: La Política Internacional”, p.75, Archivo Salvador Allende, Santiago de Chile.

⁹ En este sentido, Chile se declaraba “nación no alineada” reanudando el contacto con varios países socialistas en clara oposición a la política colectiva de la OEA cuya prerrogativa interamericana era la de no generar vínculos políticos con el bloque soviético, China o Cuba. Véase Joaquín Fernandois, *Chile y el mundo: 1970-1973: la política exterior del gobierno de la Unidad Popular y el sistema internacional*, Santiago de Chile, Universidad Católica de Chile, 1985, p. 168.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 171.

¹¹ Posiblemente, las razones deban buscarse en los acontecimientos que preceden al triunfo de la UP cuando, durante la campaña presidencial, las acciones de las brigadas muralistas jugaron un importante papel proselitista y de difusión política a lo largo del país. Por otro lado, un gran número de académicos de la Universidad de Chile, el núcleo mayoritario de la enseñanza artística, estuvo directamente involucrado en el proceso encabezado por la Unidad Popular. Para el año 1969 la Facultad de Bellas Artes se encontraba bajo la órbita del Partido Comunista, con José Balmes –activo militante del PC local y reconocido artista plástico chileno- como decano de la casa. Fueron justamente estas posiciones de alta influencia cultural, más el apoyo de un amplio sector de la izquierda, los que posibilitaron que comenzaran a discutirse y perfilarse “nuevos, populares y democráticos” proyectos culturales: Por la primera vez pintores, escritores, músicos, bailarines, cineastas, se reunieron para reflexionar, discutir juntos sobre su papel en la transformación del país. Este movimiento, iniciado por los artistas plásticos, dio nacimiento al Comité de artistas y escritores. Fue algo inmenso. Y el debate muy intenso Catherine Humblot, “L’histoire d’un peuple sur les murs du Chili. Entretien avec José Balmes”, *Le Monde*, París, 13 de junio de 1974. La traducción es mía.

Justo Pastor Mellado ha señalado lo interesante e inédito de esta situación, donde un grupo que pertenecía a las artes visuales alcanzó un alto grado de responsabilidad política.¹²

En el nuevo contexto chileno y dentro de este inédito marco de participación cultural, el Estado apoyó iniciativas con fondos destinados a implementar políticas que la incentivarán y promovieran. El respaldo a las universidades fue una de las aristas de este programa y la creación del Instituto de Arte Latinoamericano una de aquellas apuestas de renovación.¹³ Si la política cultural de la UP se alineaba con el espíritu integracionista del gobierno, uno de los objetivos prioritarios del IAL fue el de establecer vínculos con América Latina y el Caribe. Pero fue la iniciativa de generar un programa de acción estético-revolucionario el objetivo que marcó más claramente el perfil político del Instituto.

En este contexto, para 1971 un eje artístico-cultural La Habana-Santiago se encontraba en vías de consolidarse y con la intención de proyectar su propuesta latinoamericanista en el continente. La idea central de esta alianza fue la de articular en conjunto un frente artístico antiimperialista. Si bien este tipo de iniciativas eran corrientes en la época, lo novedoso de esta propuesta residía en que ambos países presentaban sus proyectos como parte de la cultura oficial. Incluso como un proyecto político, ya que existía una fuerte convicción en las posibilidades concretas de colaborar por medio de la militancia cultural al afianzamiento del modelo revolucionario.

Con ese fin el IAL y Casa de las Américas programaron para mayo de 1972, el *Primer Encuentro de la Plástica Latinoamericana* que se llevaría a cabo en La Habana. Mariano Rodríguez (subdirector de Casa de las Américas) y Miguel Rojas Mix (director del IAL) fueron los principales organizadores del encuentro.

¹² Federico Galende, *Filtraciones I. Conversaciones sobre arte en Chile (de los '60 a los '80)*, Santiago de Chile, UARCIS-Cuarto Propio, 2008.

¹³ Dependiente de la Facultad de Bellas Artes de la Universidad de Chile, el IAL fue creado con una perspectiva latinoamericanista y con el objetivo de organizar actividades de extensión universitaria. De él dependían tres dependencias que canalizaban los distintos proyectos: el Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, el Museo de Arte Popular y la Sala Universitaria.

El mismo fue concebido como el primero de una serie de reuniones destinadas a pensar el rol y futuras acciones del artista revolucionario en América Latina.

Varios acontecimientos enmarcan y determinan el rumbo de este “polo cultural socialista”. El contexto en el cual se inscribe esta iniciativa presenta múltiples aristas que permiten vincularla a diversas situaciones que se desarrollaron durante los primeros años de la década. Por un lado, la compleja escena cubana caracterizada por una política interna en crisis a la que se sumaba la necesidad del país de proyectar de modo concreto su modelo en Latinoamérica.¹⁴ Por otro lado, el novedoso panorama chileno, que con el sorpresivo triunfo de la Unidad Popular redefinía el mapa político de América Latina. Esta situación representó nuevas posibilidades de acción conjunta para los intereses cubanos dentro del continente, más específicamente aquellos concentrados en el área del Cono Sur.

El Primer Encuentro de la Plástica Latinoamericana

Si la función social del artista era un tema crucial en los debates que se sucedieron durante estos años, debe considerarse que en Cuba la relación entre cultura y revolución atravesaba por un momento de replanteos que la diferenciaba de la cordialidad que caracterizó el vínculo entre el gobierno de la UP y la cultura chilena. De hecho, el poder político que Allende había otorgado a las brigadas y a los referentes de la educación artística universitaria, contrastaba fuertemente con la situación que vivían muchos artistas y escritores cubanos.¹⁵

¹⁴En este sentido, el proyecto cultural se presentó como una importante apuesta por diversos motivos, pero fundamentalmente, por la debilidad política del modelo cubano en el plano internacional. La fuerte presión política internacional y el bloqueo económico impuesto sobre Cuba, obligaban al país a buscar salidas alternativas para su economía. Generar un polo socialista en Latinoamérica era su mayor ambición pero también la más inaccesible. Acercarse al ya consolidado bloque económico de los países de Europa del Este fue la opción más viable.

¹⁵ En esta instancia, no podemos dejar de señalar los muy distintos momentos del proceso revolucionario que atravesaban ambos países. Jorge Edwards ha señalado como también “...Fidel había cortejado esa opinión [la de otorgar espacio de influencia a un grupo proveniente del área de la cultura], sintiendo que ella era una de las líneas defensivas de la revolución cubana, un instrumento para romper el bloqueo. Pero en los últimos años todo había cambiado...”, Jorge Edwards, *Persona non Grata*, Madrid, Alfaguara, 2006, p. 333. Para 1970, cuando Cuba ya contaba con el apoyo de la U.R.S.S., Castro decide acelerar la ruptura con la intelectualidad de izquierda internacional. Es en este marco donde se hace más entendible el encarcelamiento de Heberto Padilla y su esposa Belkis Cruz Malé en marzo de 1971.

Por ese entonces, la isla se encontraba envuelta en una lucha de facciones por el poder que, si bien nunca habían estado ausentes de la vida cubana, se habían potenciado con las limitaciones ya inocultables del proceso revolucionario. Sin duda, el acelerado acercamiento al bloque soviético contribuyó al conflicto.¹⁶ Este suceso también marcó el comienzo de la ruptura con el bloque intelectual de la izquierda internacional, puntualmente por la decisión de Castro de apoyar la invasión rusa a Checoslovaquia.

En ese momento, una lucha de poder por el control de la cultura se hizo cada vez más evidente desatando una fuerte batalla en torno al rol del intelectual dentro de la revolución. El conjunto de estos sucesos llevaron a que, desde 1969, se produjera un accionar contra la intervención crítica de la intelectualidad en la esfera pública.¹⁷ El año 1971 marcó el clímax dentro de esta situación. El encarcelamiento del escritor Heberto Padilla por presuntas actividades contrarrevolucionarias, en marzo de ese mismo año, desató un fuerte rechazo internacional que llevó a la ruptura definitiva de un grupo de escritores e intelectuales con la Revolución.¹⁸ Sin embargo, la Revolución Cubana era un espacio de legitimidad ideológica indiscutido para la mayor parte de la intelectualidad que en Latinoamérica perseguía el modelo del socialismo como una salida social.

Pero más que en la esfera cultural, los motivos que llevaron al realineamiento cultural cubano deben buscarse en las nuevas alianzas políticas y económicas que Cuba debió trazar en la coyuntura del fracaso de la “zafra de los diez millones”.¹⁹ Quizás el más sobresaliente fue su ingreso en el Consejo de Ayuda Mutua Económica (CAME) en julio de 1972, “...lo que hizo

¹⁶ Posiblemente las tensiones intrínsecas entre las ideas del marxismo-leninismo y del tercermundismo sean el ejemplo que mejor grafica un conflicto que se vio agravado por el franco acercamiento de Castro al bloque soviético.

¹⁷ La “ofensiva contrarrevolucionaria” enmarca las medidas que el gobierno de la revolución dirigió con el fin de neutralizar lo que, en diversos órdenes, significaba la existencia de un espacio plural.

¹⁸ Un pormenorizado análisis del Caso Padilla puede leerse en Claudia Gilman, *Entre la pluma y el fusil...*, op. cit., cap. 6.

¹⁹ Unos meses antes, todo el pueblo de Cuba se había involucrado en un plan económico que consistía en la producción masiva de azúcar para obtener recursos y nivelar el comercio exterior. Durante ese período, el país entero estuvo en función de una empresa que se había ideado como instancia ineludible para lograr el impulso que permitiera a salir del “atraso”.

mayor la subordinación al sistema económico de los países del Este europeo,²⁰ y también provocó una marcada influencia en muchos sectores de la Isla del tipo de pensamiento predominante en la Unión Soviética.”²¹

En este contexto, durante el *Primer Congreso Nacional de Educación y Cultura* (CNEC) se postularon en forma oficial y programática los criterios ideológico-culturales que marcaron el nuevo vínculo entre la revolución y los intelectuales.²² En su discurso de clausura, el propio Fidel Castro señaló sin vueltas cómo, a partir de ese momento, la cultura estaría regida por los lineamientos del marxismo-leninismo.²³ Se sellaba así el perfil político y educativo que la cultura debería adoptar de allí en más. Informar y educar eran las premisas sobre las que debía basarse toda expresión artística. Con la asunción de Luis Pavón Tamayo²⁴ al frente del Consejo Nacional de Cultura se inauguraba en Cuba el “Quinquenio Gris”, un período donde -en términos generales y de manera tácita- la cultura oficial quedó subordinada a los “parámetros” del realismo socialista. En ese contexto muchos intelectuales y artistas fueron excluidos de la vida cultural.²⁵

Si bien Casa de las Américas había podido moverse con relativa libertad hasta 1968, el nuevo contexto cubano la obligaba a dar un giro respecto de esta postura. El conflicto desatado por el Caso Padilla había puesto en la cuerda floja a la Casa y a su directora, Haydeé Santamaría. En parte por esta razón, un cambio de rumbo comenzó a vislumbrarse cuando en

²⁰Una clara evidencia discursiva de este hecho fue el modo en que en los discursos el concepto de clase obrera fue cobrando cada vez más presencia.

²¹ Arturo Arango, “Con tantos palos que te dio la vida. Poesía, censura y persistencia”. Esta ponencia integró el ciclo de conferencias *La política cultural del período revolucionario: memoria y reflexión*, organizado por el Centro Teórico-Cultural Criterios, Casa de las Américas, La Habana, 30 de enero de 2007.

²² El *Primer Congreso...* tuvo lugar en el Hotel Habana Libre del 23 al 30 de abril de 1971. La Declaración del Primer Congreso Nacional de Educación y Cultura fue originalmente publicada en *Casa de las Américas*, año XI, n° 65-66, marzo-junio de 1971, pp. 4-19.

²³ “...las ideas marxista-leninistas han calado profundamente en el corazón y en la conciencia de nuestro pueblo y muy especialmente en una gran parte de nuestros educadores”, cfr. “Discurso pronunciado por el Comandante Fidel Castro Ruiz, <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1971/esp/f300471e.html>.

²⁴ Pavón Tamayo había sido -durante los años sesenta- director de la revista *Verde Olivo*, órgano del Partido Comunista de Cuba. De ese modo, su nombramiento implicó una relación orgánica entre el partido y la cultura oficial.

²⁵ En relación al período véase Ambrosio Fornet, “El Quinquenio Gris: revisitando el término”, esta ponencia integró el ciclo de conferencias *La política cultural del período revolucionario: memoria y reflexión*, organizado por el Centro Teórico-Cultural Criterios, Casa de las Américas, La Habana, 30 de enero de 2007.

1969 la revista publicó las desgrabaciones de una conversación colectiva que con motivo del décimo aniversario de la revolución, se había llevado a cabo en el estudio del pintor Mariano Rodríguez.²⁶ Si en ese momento Casa de las Américas comenzaba a mostrar los nuevos lineamientos culturales, en 1971 ya no dudaría en afirmar cómo su política “... ha sido, es y será inequívocamente fiel a las exigencias más profundas de nuestra Revolución y por ello a la audacia creadora”.²⁷

¿Cómo debe leerse entonces el encuentro organizado por el IAL y la Casa?. Frente al rechazo de un sector de los intelectuales de la izquierda internacional a la nueva línea de la revolución, ¿Es posible plantearlo como un intento por rearticular una red de apoyo internacional?. Si así fue, ¿Es posible afirmar que a partir de entonces la línea de apoyo podría venir del campo de las artes plásticas -un espacio que hasta el momento no había presentado tantas fisuras como el literario-?. ¿Había influido como antecedente en esta decisión el fuerte poder político que las brigadas muralistas habían alcanzado en Chile?.

El *Primer encuentro de la Plástica Latinoamericana* se inserta en este complejo contexto en el cual se destacan dos instancias: por un lado el reordenamiento de la política cultural cubana; y por otro, la rearticulación de su propuesta revolucionaria y su proyección en el exterior.

En julio de 1971, solo dos meses después de celebrado el CNEC, a través de la “Declaración de la Habana” las instituciones chilena y cubana convocaban al encuentro.²⁸ Sus objetivos –señalaba el documento- respondían a “la necesidad de crear nuevos valores, para configurar un nuevo arte que sea patrimonio de todos y que sea a la vez expresión íntima de nuestra América”. En este sentido, buscaba la abierta confrontación con “...los mecanismos del

²⁶ “Diez años de revolución: el intelectual y la sociedad”, *Casa de las Américas*, La Habana, año x, n°56, septiembre-octubre 1969, pp. 6-48.

²⁷ “Declaración de Casa de las Américas”, en *Casa de las Américas*, año XI, n° 67, julio-agosto de 1971, p.149. El n° 67 de la revista estuvo dedicado, en parte, a las repercusiones del caso Padilla, en ese contexto debe leerse la declaración. También una “Declaración de los intelectuales chilenos”, entre ellos algunos de los participantes y organizadores del encuentro, fue publicada por la revista, pp. 161-163.

²⁸ *Declaración de La Habana- Encuentro de Plástica Latinoamericana*, Casa de las Américas de la Habana y el Instituto de Arte Latinoamericano de la Universidad de Chile, mimeo, 26 de julio de 1971.

imperialismo y su política colonial”.²⁹ Si bien no podemos realizar aquí un análisis comparativo, es interesante señalar como cada párrafo de la convocatoria estaba basado en la Declaración del Congreso. Asimismo, se citaba textualmente un pasaje de la misma,

La revolución libera al arte y la literatura de los férreos mecanismos de la oferta y la demanda imperantes en la sociedad burguesa. El arte y la literatura dejan de ser mercancías y se crean todas las posibilidades para la expresión y experimentación estética en sus más diversas manifestaciones sobre la base del rigor ideológico y la alta calificación técnica.³⁰

Dos aspectos estrechamente relacionados se desprenden de esta cita. El primero -y más evidente-, el enfrentamiento a la idea de mercado como uno de los motores de la sociedad de consumo. Pero en segundo lugar, marcaba una posición política puntual: el rol de la Revolución como único regulador de la cultura; es decir, como única instancia de legitimación para los escritores y artistas. El concepto, marcaba con claridad la subordinación de todas las esferas de la vida social a la revolución. Desde esta perspectiva, el Estado venía a ocupar el lugar que, dentro de la sociedad burguesa, se atribuía al mercado y la crítica. Visto desde otro ángulo también implicaba, como señala Claudia Gilman, que “los intelectuales [cubanos] carecían de instancias de mediación que les fueran absolutamente propias o que controlaran absolutamente”.³¹

Complementariamente, un temario propuesto para el encuentro estaba articulado en torno a la responsabilidad del artista en América Latina y a las estrategias culturales que debía articular una política artística revolucionaria.³² Serían estos, los lineamientos que dirigirían los debates.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ *Declaración de La Habana- Encuentro de Plástica Latinoamericana*, op. cit. También cfr., “Declaración del Primer Congreso Nacional de Educación y Cultura”, *Casa de las Américas*, art. cit., p. 17.

³¹ Claudia Gilman, *Entre la pluma...*, op. cit., p. 226.

³² “Temario”, en *Dos encuentros. Encuentro de Artistas Plásticos del Cono Sur (Chile) - Encuentro de Plástica Latinoamericana (Cuba)*, Miguel Ángel Rojas Mix, (ed.), serie *Cuadernos de Arte Latinoamericano*, Santiago de Chile, IAL- Andrés Bello, 1973, p. 28.

La reunión en La Habana fue precedida por otra en Santiago de Chile: el *Primer Encuentro de Artistas plásticos del Cono Sur*. Se trató de una instancia preparatoria organizada por el director del IAL, Miguel Rojas Mix, quien congregó a un conjunto de artistas locales, argentinos y uruguayos con el fin de unificar criterios para la reunión cubana.³³ La presencia de Mariano Rodríguez en calidad de espectador enfatizaba el carácter bilateral de esta alianza cultural,³⁴ y nos permite pensar ambos eventos como parte de un mismo proceso.

Una vez finalizada la reunión, los artistas delegados de cada país fueron partiendo rumbo a La Habana. Entre el 24 y el 30 de mayo de 1972, se reunieron en Cuba representantes de diez países latinoamericanos.³⁵

Si el rol del artista revolucionario había sido un tema central para los debates de la reunión en Chile, en Cuba es fundamental pensar esta cuestión no sólo desde los aspectos latinoamericanistas y aquellos otros que concernían a la articulación del bloque revolucionario del Cono Sur, sino también considerando la mencionada coyuntura cubana. A este factor, también deben sumarse las diferencias que existían en la siempre compleja relación entre poder e intelectualidad en cada uno de los países latinoamericanos: si en la isla las improntas revolucionarias eran parte de la vida política oficial, en Chile eran una fuerza en vías de afianzamiento, y en Argentina una fuerza contrahegemónica.

Al respecto Rojas Mix señalaba como las tácticas podían diferir tomando en cuenta las particularidades de cada región, pero siempre desde una estrategia común de frente antiimperialista.³⁶ Por esa razón, tanto en Chile como en Cuba se enfatizó sobre la imperiosa necesidad de construir instancias movilizadoras de denuncia y lucha para los artistas de América

³³ De esas discusiones surgió el informe final que sirvió como ponencia del encuentro en Cuba. De allí se infiere que ambos eventos no deben ser pensados por separado si no como parte de un mismo proceso, cfr. "Encuentro de Artistas Plásticos del Cono Sur (Chile)", en *Dos encuentros*, op. cit., p.5.

³⁴ Declaración de Miguel Rojas Mix en Carlos Piñeiro Loredó, *Artes Plásticas y lucha revolucionaria*, op. cit., p. 2.

³⁵ Los países representados eran Argentina, Brasil, Colombia, Cuba, Chile, México, Panamá, Perú, Pº Rico, Uruguay y Venezuela. Entre los participantes se contaron: Miguel Rojas Mix y José Balmes (Chile), Ricardo Carpani (Argentina) y Mariano Rodríguez (Cuba). Por su parte, el artista argentino Julio Le Parc concurrió en representación de los artistas latinoamericanos residentes en Europa, véase el listado completo en *Casa de las Américas. Boletín de artes plásticas, n°1, s/d (c.1972-1973)*.

³⁶ Declaración de Rojas Mix en Carlos Piñeiro Loredó, *Artes Plásticas y lucha revolucionaria*, op. cit., p.2

Latina.³⁷ No obstante las diferencias marcadas, a partir del fortalecimiento de este polo cultural podrían comenzar a pensarse nuevos espacios, que ya no se entenderían como lugares de denuncia y protesta, sino desde donde debatir y construir proyectos estéticos y culturales. Con ese objetivo, entre el 24 y el 30 de mayo de 1972, se reunieron en La Habana representantes de diez países latinoamericanos para debatir las bases sobre las cuales debería fundarse el nuevo arte revolucionario.

Según los datos que hemos podido relevar, durante las sesiones las delegaciones nacionales leyeron una serie de ponencias. Allí se leyeron los informes elaborados por las comisiones que unos días antes habían sesionado en Santiago³⁸ además, nuevo material fue presentado por la numerosa comitiva cubana. En ella, se destacaba el apego a muchos de los lineamientos resultantes del Congreso Nacional de Educación y Cultura haciendo hincapié sobre un tema central en la relación entre arte y revolución: la lucha contra el concepto individualista y “burgués” del arte en pos de la “universalización de la cultura” a través del trabajo colectivo y la incorporación masiva del pueblo en sus filas.³⁹

Tanto la ponencia cubana, como los informes que conformaron la ponencia por parte de los artistas del Cono Sur, fueron publicados por Rojas Mix como parte de la serie “Cuadernos de Arte Latinoamericano” que dirigía en la editorial chilena Andrés Bello.⁴⁰ La publicación, también incluía dos anexos a la presentación cubana: uno referido al cartel cubano y otro al dibujo humorístico y la tira cómica. Ciertamente resultan lógicas estas incorporaciones como un modelo de arte revolucionario. Fundamentalmente, el cartel se presentaba como una de las más acabadas manifestaciones ideológicas y culturales de la revolución ya que en él se combinaban

³⁷ En esta dirección Ricardo Carpani, delegado argentino apuntaba sobre el hecho del encuentro como síntoma de que “... existe toda una conciencia latinoamericanista creciente, que nos obliga... a ponernos de acuerdo para instrumentar una estrategia general que sea realmente eficaz en la lucha contra la penetración imperialista”, en Carlos Piñeiro Loredo, *Artes Plásticas y lucha revolucionaria*, op. cit., p.2.

³⁸ Allí, la dinámica de trabajo estuvo marcada por la intervención de los artistas en cinco comisiones que debatieron en torno a los siguientes temas: 1. Significación ideológica del arte. 2. El arte en América Latina y en el momento histórico mundial. 3. Arte y comunicación de masas. 4. Arte y creación popular. 5. Estrategia cultural. Las conclusiones de los debates quedaron plasmadas en los informes elaborados por cada una de las comisiones y presentados en cinco reuniones plenarias, cfr., *Dos encuentros...*, op. cit., p. 6-21.

³⁹ “Ponencia de la delegación Cubana”, en *Dos encuentros...*, op. cit., p.31.

⁴⁰ Miguel Rojas Mix (ed.), *Dos encuentros...*, op. cit.

las necesidades informativas y educacionales que se buscaban privilegiar en la política cultural cubana. De hecho, en Cuba existía una larga tradición afichística que no había sido ajena a la publicidad norteamericana, así como a varios de los movimientos que signaron la escena internacional estética a mediados del siglo XX: por ejemplo, el pop o la abstracción geométrica. Muchos artistas y diseñadores cubanos habían trabajado e intercambiado influencias con sus pares estadounidenses antes de la revolución. La principal diferencia radicaba en el contenido social del cartel cubano que buscaba subvertir y transformar las “concepciones burguesas” de la publicidad, para dirigirla hacia la promoción del proceso revolucionario a través de la difusión de sus logros y proyectos: la reforma agraria, la campaña alfabetizadora, la victoria de Playa Girón, así como encuentros, reuniones e incluso campañas de solidaridad con los pueblos del Tercer Mundo, son algunos ejemplos.

Durante el *I Encuentro...* se suscribieron una serie de acuerdos que contemplaban la creación de un centro de investigación de las artes plásticas latinoamericanas y de centros coordinadores informativos (adjuntos al departamento de artes plásticas de Casa de las Américas y al Instituto de Arte Latinoamericano en la Universidad de Chile). Estos centros debían canalizar diversas formas de apoyo a la lucha revolucionaria a través de: talleres, brigadas y otras agrupaciones plásticas o de carácter mixto; exposiciones colectivas multicontinentales y nacionales que deberían estar encabezadas por el “Llamamiento del Encuentro de la Plástica Latinoamericana”. Por otro lado, el encuentro se declaraba abierto y en actividad permanente debiéndose celebrar una reunión por año en La Habana.

En este sentido, el *I Encuentro...* planteó una nueva instancia de relación entre los artistas latinoamericanos a través de la creación de un espacio común que sirviera como canal de diálogo y acciones conjuntas. A su vez, uno de sus objetivos centrales fue el crear un documento que funcionase como manifiesto para los “artistas revolucionarios”. Se trataba de una declaración de principios -sin fisuras- que mostrase una América Latina unida en un frente cultural antiimperialista y revolucionario.

No son casuales las figuras citadas en la apertura del “Llamamiento de los Plásticos Latinoamericanos”. Simón Bolívar y José Martí, dos ineludibles referentes históricos, sellaban con toda claridad el carácter latinoamericano del encuentro. Asimismo lo insertaban en continuidad con los ideales integracionistas que signaron a parte de la intelectualidad americanista desde los albores independentistas,

Para nosotros, la patria es la América.
Simón Bolívar (1814)

No hay letras, que son expresión, hasta que no hay esencia que expresar en ellas. Ni habrá literatura hispanoamericana hasta que no haya Hispanoamérica.
José Martí (1881).⁴¹

Las palabras de Martí, también señalaban una cuestión de fondo en todos los debates del arte revolucionario que se extendían por el continente: que la sociedad revolucionaria debía preceder a la existencia de su estilo. “El arte no podrá modificarse radicalmente sin una nueva cultura”, declaraban los artistas argentinos y chilenos en el encuentro.⁴² Allí justamente se fundamenta el apoyo a la pluralidad de estilos y la libertad de creación. De hecho, la frase de Martí continuaba de este modo: “Estamos en tiempos de ebullición, no de condensación: de mezcla de elementos, no de obra de elementos unidos”.⁴³

El documento también definía claramente la función del artista revolucionario como una instancia de carácter eminentemente político y militante. Dentro de la cultura revolucionaria,

El artista latinoamericano no puede declararse neutral ni separar abstractamente su condición de artista de sus deberes como hombre. La conciencia revolucionaria parte, en el artista, del reconocimiento de su situación de alienado y mutilado él también en el ejercicio de su actividad creativa, y de que la superación de tal situación solo puede lograrla insertándose activa y eficazmente en la lucha revolucionaria, reconociéndola como su propia lucha y librándola con sus armas desde dentro mismo del proceso. Es por ello que para el artista latinoamericano la

⁴¹ “Llamamiento a los artistas plásticos latinoamericanos”, *Casa de las Américas. Boletín de artes plásticas, n°1*, op. cit.

⁴² Cfr. “Significación ideológica del arte”, en *Dos encuentros...*, op. cit., p.6.

⁴³ José Martí, “Cuaderno de Apuntes 5”, en *Obras Completas*, Tomo 21, La Habana, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1975, p. 164.

actitud militante vale tanto, tiene tanta importancia como su obra. Una y otra deben identificarse.⁴⁴

En este sentido, se entiende el impacto que generó en algunos participantes *Tucumán Arde* (1968), una experiencia colectiva donde un grupo de artistas argentinos de vanguardia, tomó ciertos aspectos de la realidad social para generar una experiencia estético-política que tuviera incidencia real en la sociedad.⁴⁵

Acompañando el encuentro, la Galería de Arte Latinoamericano de Casa de las Américas albergó la *Exposición de Plástica Latinoamericana*. La heterogeneidad estilística de los participantes - varios de ellos suscribieron las bases del encuentro- dejó definida la idea de que no había un único “estilo revolucionario”. Como hemos visto, distintas experiencias eran consideradas modelos viables de arte revolucionario: los murales colectivos de las brigadas en Chile, el cartel cubano, o incluso una experiencia de vanguardia como *Tucumán Arde*. En cuanto a la muestra, los estilos presentes iban de los más abstractos a los más figurativos, de lo puramente formal a lo narrativo; tendencias tan distintas como el cinetismo, el pop, el informalismo o el surrealismo, convivían en una búsqueda cuyos puntos de contacto debían buscarse en los elementos extrartísticos. Igualmente inclusiva era la variedad de técnicas presentes: desde pintura y escultura, hasta afiches panfletarios. El mismo catálogo daba cuenta de este pluralismo tomando una frase del llamamiento para su breve texto: “La lucha contra el imperialismo y la dependencia no propone modelos rígidos a los que deba subordinarse toda

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ En la misma, el arte como arma para la lucha y su inscripción en los medios de comunicación –un terreno de comprobada eficacia comunicacional– fueron los pilares sobre los que debía asentarse el nuevo lenguaje estético que, según entendían los artistas, llevaría hacia una verdadera toma de conciencia social. Desde ese lugar buscaron construir un circuito de contrainformación que se opusiera al discurso de la dictadura militar del General Juan Carlos Onganía, y así evidenciar la manipulación que los medios y el gobierno hacían de la realidad. Más allá de los resultados de la experiencia arrojó, ciertos aspectos de la propuesta (su carácter de producción colectiva, la búsqueda de incidencia social, la interdisciplinariedad o la fusión de estilos) generaron fuertes expectativas en las reuniones de Cuba y Chile. Excede el propósito de este trabajo realizar una descripción más detallada o incluso un análisis de esta paradigmática experiencia. Distintos abordajes y análisis de la obra pueden consultarse en: Ana Longoni y Mariano Mestman, *Del Di Tella a “Tucumán Arde”*. *Vanguardia artística y política en el '68 argentino*. Buenos Aires, El cielo por asalto, 2000, pp. 178-227; Andrea Giunta, *Vanguardia, internacionalismo y política. Arte argentino en los sesenta*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, 2001, pp. 363-374; Mariana Marchesi y María José Herrera, “Tucumán Arde-documento”, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (Buenos Aires), Queens Museum of Art (New York) y Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1999, video documental, b/n, 25’.

forma de hacer”.⁴⁶ Si en principio la pluralidad estética que el encuentro y la muestra proyectaban hacia el exterior parecen contradecirse con un campo artístico interno “parametrizado”, es justamente en estas tensiones entre la política cultural interna y externa donde se reflejan claramente las estrategias políticas que Cuba intentó trazar en este período. Es decir, el ingreso al círculo económico de la Unión Soviética y el intento por generar una red que vinculara una América Latina unida por el modelo revolucionario cubano.

Colorarios y continuidad del Encuentro de la Plástica Latinoamericana

Con posterioridad al encuentro, en su carácter de centro coordinador y tal como fue acordado hacia el cierre del encuentro, Casa de las Américas publicó en su primer *Boletín de artes plásticas* “a manera de memoria, las actividades y documentos más sobresalientes...como inicio de un servicio informativo para los plásticos revolucionarios del continente”.⁴⁷ Por otro lado, los asistentes al encuentro se comprometieron a “...seguir los pronunciamientos del Llamamiento, así como a realizar una labor de proselitismo antisectario entre los plásticos de América Latina, buscando la unión contra el enemigo común”. Estas mociones tenían como finalidad generar iniciativas que siguieran los lineamientos discutidos y consensuados en La Habana, pero teniendo en cuenta a su vez las especificidades coyunturales de cada país. Allí quedaba plasmado uno de los objetivos principales de la reunión.

En este sentido, una serie de iniciativas llevadas a cabo por distintos grupos de artistas participantes se vinculaban con las consignas del “Llamamiento...” y con las discusiones y los debates desarrollados tanto en Chile como en Cuba.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ “Llamamiento...”, op. cit.

⁴⁷ El boletín incluyó el “Llamamiento a los artistas plásticos latinoamericanos”, la “Declaración de solidaridad con la lucha del pueblo vietnamita, los “Acuerdos”, y el catálogo de la muestra. Además, se incluyeron breves reflexiones de cada uno de los participantes del encuentro. *Boletín Casa de las Américas- Artes Plásticas*, n°1, s/f (c.1972-1973). También la Editorial Chilena Andrés Bello publicó dentro de la serie Cuadernos de Arte Latinoamericanos el citado volumen editado por Miguel A. Rojas Mix, *Dos encuentros. Encuentro de Artistas Plásticos del Cono Sur (Chile) - Encuentro de Plástica Latinoamericana (Cuba)*, Santiago de Chile, IAL- Andrés Bello, 1973.

⁴⁸ En el caso de Argentina fue el punto de partida para una serie de acciones estético-políticas que tuvieron lugar en Buenos Aires y Rosario. Entre ellos, Graciela Carnevale y Juan Pablo Renzi organizaron el Frente Antiimperialista

Durante ese período, los contactos e intercambios entre artistas en Europa, en Cuba y en el continente (sobre todo la zona comprendida por el Cono Sur) fueron fluidos. La intensidad del intercambio queda evidenciada en la profusa correspondencia en donde los artistas relatan sus opiniones sobre las actividades concretadas y las diversas estrategias de activismo y denuncia para llevarlas adelante. Muchas de ellas habían tenido como instancia movilizadora al encuentro cubano y su “Llamamiento...”.

Pero si bien los vínculos y la circulación de información eran constantes, la situación chilena, cada día más complicada, dificultaba la concreción de muchas de las iniciativas que habían tenido en ellos a uno de sus principales motores. En una carta enviada a Graciela Carnevale, Rojas Mix señalaba como,

...sin embargo para nosotros esta actividad ha resultado más difícil de lo que pensábamos, porque la lucha política se ha ido haciendo cada día más dura. [...] Te voy a contar algo de lo que está pasando en este país que es nuestro, de todos los latinoamericanos. Hemos vivido períodos muy angustiosos, de una verdadera guerra civil; donde si no se escuchó el ruido de las metralletas, si se escuchó el sonar de ollas y cacerolas, que golpeaban las viejas y reaccionarias “momias”...⁴⁹

“Cambiar América Latina no es tarea fácil”, agregaba.⁵⁰ Los conflictos internos chilenos no dejaban lugar a dudas. A la debilidad del gobierno, debían sumarse las constantes protestas de un vasto sector social –fundamentalmente las clases media y alta-, y las acciones de Estados

de Artistas de Rosario (F.A.D.A.R.) con el objetivo principal de implementar formas de activismo y denuncia, en algunos casos coordinando con algunos artistas e intelectuales de Buenos Aires y otros países en Latinoamérica o Europa (cfr. “Declaración del Frente Antiimperialista de Artistas de Rosario”, Agosto de 1972. Archivo Graciela Carnevale, Rosario). También los artistas argentinos residentes en Europa siguieron las consignas del Llamamiento refrendado en La Habana. Con ese fin, hacia fines de 1972, Julio Le Parc conforma el grupo de trabajo América Latina No Oficial. El grupo funcionaba más informalmente desde fines de los años sesenta con el objetivo de apoyar las luchas de liberación en América Latina, fundamentalmente a través de “exposiciones de denuncia” sobre la situación latinoamericana que servían como plataformas contrainformacionales frente a los datos oficiales que circulaban desde las embajadas latinoamericanas en Europa. Pero, a partir del Primer encuentro se advierte la clara intención de Le Parc de dar al grupo mayor organicidad. Para ello organizaron la edición de un boletín a partir del editado por Casa de las Américas y completado por la difusión de las actividades realizadas por el grupo y otros artistas en Latinoamérica. También se organizó, para enero de 1973, la exposición “Represión, opresión y lucha del pueblo latinoamericano”, al respecto cfr., Julio Le Parc en “Encuentro para una nueva plástica”, La Habana, CUBA, octubre, 1973, op. cit., p. 49, y Comunicado para difusión del Grupo de París, América Latina No Oficial, París, noviembre de 1972. Archivo Graciela Carnevale, Rosario. En relación a las actividades de este grupo, véase también en la tesis doctoral de Isabel Plante, *Consagración de las producciones visuales y crítica institucional entre Buenos Aires y París durante los años '60 (1962-1973)*, FFyL-UBA, el capítulo “América Latina como tema para la producción visual”.

⁴⁹[Miguel Rojas Mix], carta a Graciela Carnevale, Santiago de Chile, 5 de diciembre de 1972. Archivo Graciela Carnevale, Rosario.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

Unidos por desestabilizar el gobierno popular. La suma de estos y otros factores –como por ejemplo, las tensiones entre las distintas facciones de la izquierda- llevó en septiembre de 1973 a la caída de Salvador Allende.

El golpe de Estado impidió la concreción del *II Encuentro de Artistas Plásticos del Cono Sur* que estaba programado para la primera quincena de octubre de 1973 y que, al igual que el primero, debía desarrollarse días antes del encuentro en La Habana. Para ese entonces el Instituto de Arte Latinoamericano ya había sido desarticulado. El mismo día del golpe, todo el personal del IAL fue cesanteado y muchos de sus integrantes, entre ellos Rojas Mix, debieron exiliarse en Europa.⁵¹

Con este trasfondo, el *II Encuentro de la Plástica Latinoamericana* que se celebraba en La Habana, en conmemoración de un nuevo aniversario del abatimiento del *Che* en Bolivia, estuvo íntegramente dedicado a la lucha del pueblo chileno y el recrudecimiento del fascismo en América Latina.⁵² El golpe también había impedido la concurrencia de la delegación chilena. Una ausencia que fue “simbólicamente suplida” por el poeta Gonzalo Rojas, encargado de las relaciones diplomáticas de Chile en Cuba durante el gobierno de la Unidad Popular, a quien el golpe había sorprendido en la isla.⁵³ Frente a este panorama resultó natural que él acompañara a Mariano Rodríguez presidiendo la sesión inaugural del encuentro.⁵⁴ Durante esa jornada se elaboró y se aprobó una “Declaración de solidaridad con el pueblo chileno”.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Lo mismo sucedió en otras dependencias de la Universidad de Chile, la mitad de su planta docente y de su alumnado fue expulsada de la Facultad de Bellas Artes. Asimismo, el Museo de Arte Contemporáneo fue cerrado, cfr. Catherine Humblot, “L’histoire d’un peuple sur les murs du Chili. Entretien avec José Balmes”, *Le Monde*, 13 de junio de 1974.

⁵² Roberto Álvarez Quiñones, “Reúñense con la prensa nacional delegados al II Encuentro de Plástica Latinoamericana”, *Granma*, 15 de octubre 1973, y “Encuentro para una nueva plástica”, La Habana, *CUBA*, octubre, 1973, p.45.

⁵³ Rojas había llegado a Cuba para suplantar a Jorge Edwards quien por desavenencias con el régimen castrista debió abandonar el país prácticamente expulsado por el propio Castro. Un exhaustivo relato autobiográfico sobre la estada de Edwards en Cuba para instalar la embajada chilena puede leerse en *Persona non grata*, op. cit.

⁵⁴ Roberto Álvarez Quiñones, “Comienza hoy el II Encuentro de Plástica Latinoamericana”, *Granma*, 16 de octubre 1973; y “Encuentro para una nueva plástica”, op. cit.

⁵⁵ véase *Casa de las Américas*, año XIV, n° 82, Enero-febrero de 1974, p.143. En días subsiguientes se redactaron nuevas declaraciones en apoyo a la lucha de los pueblos árabes y en apoyo a la lucha de Puerto Rico por su independencia, *ibid.* pp. 144-146.

A lo largo del encuentro, se escucharon los informes de las distintas delegaciones referidas a la participación de los artistas plásticos en la lucha revolucionaria de cada país durante el año y medio transcurrido⁵⁶ y, sobre la base de un balance crítico de lo actuado se inició la discusión de nuevas propuestas.⁵⁷ Todas las delegaciones centraron su informe en la realización de actividades colectivas tales como exposiciones, la redacción de llamados y manifiestos, así como la conformación de grupos de trabajo que se llamaban a funcionar conforme a los postulados acordados.

Una exposición inaugurada en el Museo Nacional acompañó el encuentro.⁵⁸ La misma estaba compuesta por unas 250 obras, en su mayoría afiches, que pueden ser entendidas como un correlato visual de lo debatido durante el encuentro: el repudio al derrocamiento de Allende y la lucha antiimperialista latinoamericana. De hecho dos fotografías abrían el recorrido por las salas: la imagen del presidente Allende con su rifle AK-47, y otra que testimoniaba lo que un cronista denominó “uno de los muchos ataques de la junta golpista contra la cultura”.⁵⁹ La imagen del presidente con su fusil resultaba altamente simbólica ya que el arma había sido un obsequio del propio Fidel Castro. A ese hecho, ya de por sí elocuente, se sumaba un dato adicional: con esa misma arma –había informado la prensa después del golpe– Allende se

⁵⁶ Siguiendo un orden cronológico, el primer turno correspondió a la delegación argentina. Graciela Carnevale, Ricardo Carpani, León Ferrari, Ignacio Colombres, Julio Le Parc, Alejandro Marcos y Luis Felipe Noé, eran los siete representantes de la comisión más numerosa después de la cubana. Carpani fue el encargado de informar como, a partir del llamamiento, “numerosos artistas participaron con sus obras denunciando la represión y la tortura del régimen militar entonces comandado por el General Alejandro A. Lanusse. Enfatizó asimismo, la divulgación del llamamiento en una serie de exposiciones (Cfr. “Encuentro para una nueva plástica”, op. cit., p.45). Durante la sesión, también hizo uso de la palabra Julio Le Parc en representación de los artistas latinoamericanos residentes en Europa. Durante su intervención comunicó la conformación del grupo América Latina No Oficial y su programa de actividades (Testimonio de Julio Le Parc en “Encuentro para una nueva plástica”, La Habana, *CUBA*, op. cit., p. 49). Por su parte, la delegación cubana se centró en dos propuestas colectivas: la ilustración del discurso de Fidel *La historia me absolverá* y la exposición *Imágenes de Cuba 1953-1973*, inaugurada durante el encuentro en la Galería de la Casa. Ambas iniciativas se desarrollaban en el marco de los festejos en homenaje al XX aniversario del asalto al Cuartel Moncada. Para esta última los artistas cubanos habían ensayado una experiencia de trabajo colectivo a través de la discusión grupal de cada una de las propuestas de obra individual (Cfr. Roberto Alvarez Quiñones, “Reúñense con la prensa nacional...”, op. cit) Además, se anunciaba la reciente publicación del primer número del *Boletín de Artes Plásticas* que fue repartido entre los asistentes.

⁵⁷ Roberto Alvarez Quiñones, “Comienza hoy...”, art. cit.

⁵⁸ El 28 de octubre, día de la inauguración, los artistas realizaron una jornada de trabajo voluntario pintando ante el público en el patio central del museo. El tema convocante fue el apoyo a la resistencia del pueblo de Chile. Más de treinta obras resultaron del trabajo realizado por otros tantos participantes del *II Encuentro de la Plástica Latinoamericana*.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

defendió hasta el final durante el asalto militar al Palacio de la Moneda el 11 de septiembre de 1973;⁶⁰ con ella, antes que claudicar frente a las fuerzas militares, se habría quitado la vida ese mismo día.⁶¹ La variedad de estilos y técnicas presentes en la muestra latinoamericana del año anterior había cedido paso a imágenes altamente retóricas, afiches políticos que narraban episodios concretos ya que la urgencia del momento así lo demandaba.⁶²

En esos días, más que nunca, cobraron vigencia las palabras que abren este trabajo. Las discusiones sobre estética habían quedado absolutamente desplazadas por la magnitud de lo sucedido en Chile y todas las expectativas que estos acontecimientos clausuraron.⁶³

A nivel mundial, varios países e instituciones se solidarizaron con la situación chilena. Al igual que en las sesiones de La Habana, el antifascismo fue la consigna de todas las manifestaciones de solidaridad que se desplegaron en Latinoamérica y Europa. De todas ellas, y por su máximo nivel de institucionalidad, podemos considerar el giro que tomó la Bienal de Venecia -inaugurada en octubre de 1974- como el ejemplo que mayor impacto causó en la escena artística internacional.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ En realidad algunas versiones explican que no se trataba del arma que Fidel le obsequiara, sino de otra que formaba parte de un conjunto de armas, también AK, que Cuba había enviado a Chile para equipar al GAP (Grupo de Amigos Personales) cuya función principal era la protección presidencial. Juan Alfaro. “Allende y la Metrallera de Fidel”, <http://www.elobservatodo.cl/admin/render/noticia/13262>. El abastecimiento de armas desde Cuba también había sido objeto de fuertes controversias en Chile. En relación al tema véase Ferrandois, *Chile y el mundo...*, op. cit, pp. 176-178.

⁶¹ También existen diversas versiones respecto de la muerte de Allende, aunque por aquellos días esta era la aceptada.

⁶² Aunque no estaban ausentes las obras de solución formal, estas representaban un porcentaje muy menor. No disponemos de suficientes imágenes como para analizar la muestra completa. Con respecto al sector argentino, varios temas se hicieron presentes. Desde la figura del *Che*, hasta afiches alusivos a la Masacre de Trelew sucedida en la provincia Argentina de Chubut un año antes. Muchos de los participantes argentinos estaban relacionados con las actividades de la CGT de los Argentinos. Se una rama sindical disidente a la Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT) a la que se encontraban vinculadas algunas personas que participaban de la cultura de izquierda (Noé y Ferrari), o al ala izquierda del peronismo entre los que también se incluían artistas como Carpani. Por esa razón, varios trabajos mostraban imágenes de Eva Perón o del escudo justicialista, este último, junto con la estrella federal, también vinculado a las FAP (Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas) y otros grupos guerrilleros asociados al peronismo como Montoneros. Cfr. *Casa de la Américas*, año XIV, n° 82, Enero-febrero de 1974, il. s/p.

⁶³ Así se vio reflejado también en los “Acuerdos y conclusiones”, *Casa de la Américas*, año XIV, n° 82, Enero-febrero de 1974, p.147-150.

⁶⁴ “Per una cultura democrática e antifascista” se llamó la edición de 1974. En aquella oportunidad Italia había cedido parte de su pabellón para las actividades enmarcadas en la muestra “Libertà a Cile” realizada en solidaridad con la situación política chilena. Cfr. *Anuario 1975- Eventi 1974, La Biennale di Venezia, 1975*. Este hecho no resulta extraño ya que Italia tenía afinidades políticas precisas con el modelo chileno. Era el momento en que la izquierda europea buscaba alternativas de tránsito hacia el socialismo por la vía democrática. Si la revolución cubana había fortalecido las posiciones partidarias de la lucha armada, el triunfo de Allende sirvió de argumento para quienes defendían la vía pacífica. Por otro lado, la bienal se encontraba transitando por un período de

Lo cierto es que con el golpe en Chile se cerraban todas las esperanzas de implementar un modelo cultural antiimperialista para Latinoamérica. Poco a poco el panorama del continente se iría modificando radicalmente. En 1974 ya no pudo concretarse un tercer encuentro.

Para ese entonces, en Argentina el panorama había cambiado drásticamente tras la muerte de Juan Domingo Perón. Fue en esa época cuando la Triple A -el grupo parapolicial que antecede a los grupos de tarea del gobierno militar- intervino con tal violencia en la arena social que, poco a poco, los ideales del arte revolucionario fueron diluyéndose en los terrenos de la censura y la represión.

En 1973, los golpes militares en Chile y Uruguay clausuraban definitivamente las posibilidades de generar un polo revolucionario en el Cono Sur. Le seguirían las irrupciones militares en Perú (1975), y en Argentina (1976).

Sin embargo y más allá de todo, los episodios analizados permiten rastrear un sistema de relaciones que se establecieron en torno a la idea de arte revolucionario. En este proyecto cobraron visibilidad muchos de los vínculos que se tejían entre los artistas latinoamericanos. Se trató de una instancia que forjó verdaderos lazos de compromiso y solidaridad artística e ideológica que fueron bruscamente truncados por la cadena de golpes militares que irrumpieron en la escena latinoamericana durante los años setenta.

redefiniciones ya que ese mismo año su reglamento fue modificado. Las fuertes pujas y negociaciones políticas dirimidas entre el socialismo y la democracia cristiana, pueden seguirse en la prensa italiana de la época.

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She is a Researcher at the Institute of Theory and Art History “Julio E. Payró” (UBA) and at National Museum of Fine Arts. In this institution Marchesi was curator for the exhibition that celebrated the 110th anniversary of the museum: *110 años- el museo en imágenes*. Currently, she teaches Contemporary Argentine Art at Torcuato Di Tella University (UTDT).

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The Threats of an Archive: The José Gómez Sicre Papers and the Risks of Writing a Latin American Art History

Abstract:

Between 1978 and 1988, art critic and curator José Gómez Sicre received a series of anonymous threat letters at his office at the Organization of American States (OAS) and at his home in Washington, D.C.—letters that are now housed at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin. Gómez Sicre, one of the earliest promoters of “Latin American art” in the U.S., had become a controversial tastemaker in the 1950s and 1960s, accused by some artists and scholars of forwarding U.S. cultural imperialism during the Cold War, most notably through his partnerships with corporations such as Esso (now Exxon-Mobile). However, the threat letters housed at the Benson library do not directly address the curator’s political and economic engagements, but instead threaten to expose his queer sexuality.

In this paper, I examine the threat letters as one pathway into the challenges—in particular, homophobia—Gómez Sicre faced working in the United States’ capital during the Cold War. My archival research and interviews with artist-friends of Gómez Sicre reveal that a specific community developed around the charismatic personality of the curator as he hosted and entertained young, predominantly male artists from throughout the hemisphere. And, while he employed universalizing formalist aesthetics to advance “Latin American art” internationally, Gómez Sicre in fact associated with artists who, because of their sexuality, would have been regarded by the U.S. government as politically threatening.

Ultimately, my consideration of the threat letters complicates the prevailing historical narrative about Gómez Sicre. Art historians Shifra Goldman, Eva Cockcroft, and Alejandro Anreus have depicted him primarily as a “Cold War hawk”—a savvy negotiator exploiting government policy and U.S. hegemony during the Cold War to build a canon of “Latin American art.” My paper interweaves this narrative with another: that of Gómez Sicre’s simultaneous negotiation of sexual politics. As a result, we can see that his modernist canon of “Latin American art” was not simply a U.S. cultural weapon of the Cold War, but rather was inflected by sexual politics that situated it in tension with the political climate of Washington, D.C.

The Threats of an Archive: The José Gómez Sicre Papers and the Risks of Writing a Latin American Art History

José Gómez Sicre was one of the first art critics to conceive of “Latin American Art” as a field of study in the United States. At the Organization of American States (OAS)—an international organization (formerly known as the Pan American Union) that sought to create political and cultural alliances between the U.S. and Latin America during the Cold War—Gómez Sicre headed a small Visual Arts Department from 1946 to 1983. From this position, he organized monthly exhibitions of art from Central and South America in D.C. as well as traveling exhibitions—some of which launched the careers of artists Rodolfo Abularach, José Luis Cuevas, Armando Morales, Alejandro Obregón, and José Antonio Velásquez—a group which he referred to as his “family of artists.”¹ While at the OAS, Gómez Sicre also published articles in several cultural magazines, created and edited the *Boletín de Artes Visuales*,² served as judge for various international biennials, and wrote and directed over twenty short documentary films about contemporary Latin American painters. He persuaded the OAS to create an acquisitions fund in 1957, to build a small exhibition space in 1960, and to found the Museum of Modern Art of Latin America (now known as the Art Museum of the Americas) in 1976, which he directed until 1983.

Through these projects, Gómez Sicre established a canon of Latin American art in the 1950s and 1960s. But what criteria did Gómez Sicre employ in deciding what should be included in the canon and what should not? The answer is not readily apparent. His art criticism usually combined descriptions of artists at work with generalized formal appraisals. Repeatedly, he praised the distinctiveness of an artist’s expression for having “universal” appeal. Throughout his life, Gómez Sicre was a firm believer in formalism. As late as 1976, he stated that “I am not

interested in political, social, nor economic factors, which always can affect the artists themselves, and my only particular creed is that the artist cannot create *without liberty*.”³

Despite these claims of objectivity, Gómez Sicre was repeatedly met with heavy criticism about the possible connections between his aesthetic tastes and the politics of the Cold War. Artists criticized his curatorial projects as devices of U.S. cultural imperialism and anti-communism, especially the Esso Salon—a series of international juried exhibitions he arranged with funding from the Esso oil company (today Exxon-Mobile). Further, Gómez Sicre’s praise for U.S. corporate patronage of the arts, and his interest in abstract painting, has been understood by scholars to indicate his political conservatism and cultural imperialism.⁴

I have found that, beyond these direct critiques, there also exist whole other strata of suspicions about Gómez Sicre—circulated primarily through gossip and rumor, and often untraceable to specific sources. I have been told that Gómez Sicre had “a very checkered career” and that there “were vicious stories . . . about him.”⁵ These stories generally portray Gómez Sicre as a rabid anti-communist. I have found that while some art historians dismiss him merely as a mulish bureaucrat, there are also suspicions that he worked as a spy for the CIA.⁶ I am struck by the way this particularly prevalent rumor demonizes him: here Gómez Sicre appears not merely to be a stooge of the U.S. government, but an active conspirator in a U.S. imperialist plot.

There is also another form of rumor and vilification surrounding Gómez Sicre. In the Gómez Sicre archives at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection is a folder labeled by archivists as “Threat Letters.” The folder includes five envelopes, with postmarks covering a period of 10 years (between June 1978 and June 1988). Each contains at least one photocopy of two documents: one is a two-column typed article, entitled “Desenmascarando a un canalla” (Unmasking a Swine), illustrated with a photograph of Gómez Sicre, which accuses him of

pedophilia and recounts the tale of a mother who claims that Gómez Sicre assaulted her seven-year-old daughter in a movie theater in the Vedado district of Havana.⁷ The second—which is not the focus of my talk today—consists of a cryptic, scribbled note and drawing. Given their unusual classification as “Threat Letters,” these documents are often some of the first items people exploring the archives look at.

That said, the “Unmasking a Swine” letter is *not* ostensibly a threat letter. It is a denunciation to be sure, but it does not contain a direct threat. Furthermore, we have no evidence to determine whether the incident described in the letter was true. We are unable to determine who sent the letter, but also who originally wrote the article, nor whether the anonymous mother and child cited ever truly existed. However, rumors of Gómez Sicre’s pedophilia had already caused public scandal in the early 1940s in Havana. By one account, the artist Wifredo Lam was rumored to have prominently placed a news-clipping about the movie theater incident in his studio for visitors to read. The scandal likely forced Gómez Sicre to leave Cuba and leading intellectuals in Havana, including the poet José Lezama Lima and José Rodríguez Feo, writer and editor of *Orígenes* magazine, remained critical of Gómez Sicre long after his departure.⁸ It is worth noting that the scandal potentially represents only one of several reasons why Gómez Sicre left Cuba; the better known explanation is that he left Cuba to help Alfred Barr curate the 1944 *Cuban Painting of Today* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and Barr encouraged him to stay in the city and take art history classes with Meyer Schapiro at Columbia University and Erwin Panofsky at NYU.

Photocopies of “Unmasking a Swine” were anonymously sent to Gómez Sicre’s home and office in 1983 and 1988—episodes indicating that sexual rumors surrounding Gómez Sicre could persist, in this particular case, as long as forty years. And these rumors traveled in

unpredictable paths. How and why did this particular document resurface in the 1980s? If we consider this a threat letter, perhaps the threat lies in the act of blackmail through disclosure of Gómez Sicre's past to his employers and patrons in D.C.

This letter was the first evidence I encountered that someone tried to use Gómez Sicre's sexuality against him. And it also called my attention to the threat facing men and women—especially homosexual men and women—occupying politically sensitive positions in Washington, D.C. during the Cold War. The McCarthy-era witch-hunts to expel communists from government positions quickly became tied to campaigns designed to remove homosexuals, who the government and the news media identified as “moral perverts”—a label conflating homosexuals with pedophiles and other sexual deviants. In his essay, “The Homosexual Menace: The Politics of Sexuality in Cold War America,” historian John D’Emilio explains that “dismissals from civilian posts in the federal government increased as soon as the sexual pervert issue arose. From 1947 through March 1950, they had averaged only five per month, but in the next six months the figure increased twelvefold.”⁹ Between 1950 and 1955 thousands of gay men and women were fired because their sexual practices (or suspicions about their sexual practices) classified them as a “security risk,” hundreds of others resigned. The threat pervaded both public and private sectors: “one study in the mid-1950s estimated that over 12,600,000 workers—more than twenty percent of the labor force—faced loyalty-security investigations.”¹⁰

The persecution of gays and lesbians in the Federal Government during the Cold War—a phenomenon historian David K. Johnson has termed “The Lavender Scare”—also had repercussions in the art world.¹¹ And Gómez Sicre, likely felt these pressures. In 1991, when asked to comment about his own experiences working at the OAS, he noted that during witch-hunts of the 1950s, he witnessed his co-workers being hounded and expelled: “I was on the verge

of losing my post,” he stated, “but through my brother, who was a military man, [Cuba’s] Auténtico party protected me.”¹²

The paranoia of the “Lavender Scare” stretched well beyond the geography of Washington, D.C. In his book, *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948-1963*, art historian Gavin Butt examines the widespread rumors in New York that the art establishment was controlled by an international collective of powerful gay men—a network referred to alternately with humor and condemnation as the “homintern,” a play on the term “Comintern” (short for Communist International).¹³ Butt notes that gossip circulated well into the 1960s about “a network of homosexual artists, dealers, and museum curators in league to promote the work of certain favorites at the expense of ‘straight’ talents.”¹⁴ In Gómez Sicre’s case, similar gossip persists well into the 21st Century. In 2001, the Bogotá-based magazine *Común Presencia*, published an interview with Colombian artist Carlos Granada, in which he reminisced about his 1962 solo exhibition at the OAS. “On the same trip as my exhibition in the gallery of the Pan-American Union in Washington, I saw David Manzur with his colorful promoter: the Cuban critic Gómez Sicre who was orchestrating a sect of homosexual Latin American artists. The anecdote is interesting because they were filming a video of Manzur, and delirious before the cameras and the many people present, he tore off his clothing and finger-painted a work on his chest.”¹⁵ The idea that Gómez Sicre was organizing a canon of gay male artists is perhaps as conspiratorial as the notion that Gómez Sicre was a clandestine CIA agent.

These stories, if proven true during Gómez Sicre’s lifetime, would have ended his career. But, what seems more important here is the connection and tension between these two myths. Both presume a degree of duplicity in Gómez Sicre’s character and an abuse of power in his actions, whether because of his “double life” as a supposed CIA operative or as a gay man

working in the homophobic culture of Cold War Washington.¹⁶ Yet, each myth also troubles the other: in one, he is the active agent for a conservative U.S. foreign policy establishment, in the other he is using OAS resources (and by extension State Department funds) to build a canon of artists who, because of their sexuality, would have been perceived by the U.S. government as politically threatening. These myths consequently affect not only how we see Gómez Sicre, but also the artists and curatorial assistants he worked with, who often have been stigmatized for associating with Gómez Sicre.¹⁷

I have no intention of explaining away these myths nor the tensions found between them. In fact, I think this tension has the potential to illuminate Gómez Sicre's curatorial endeavors in exciting new ways. José Luis Cuevas's 1954 exhibition at the Pan American Union provides a case in point. The success of this exhibition—all forty-three works on display were sold at the opening and the show was covered by *Time* magazine—has generally become understood as the launching point for Cuevas's international career.¹⁸ But the popularity of this exhibition, and of Cuevas's works in general, could not have been pre-conceived by its curator. In an interview I had with the artist in August 2008, Cuevas recalled that the night before the 1954 opening, Gómez Sicre was very nervous about the exhibition, fearing that Washington audiences were “too conservative” to appreciate Cuevas's drawings and watercolors of marginalized social figures—prostitutes, the insane, side-show freaks, and people of the street.¹⁹ According to Cuevas, Gómez Sicre even considered cancelling the exhibition at the last minute. The contexts of McCarthyism and the “Lavender Scare,” help throw into relief why Gomez Sicre's decision to go through with the exhibition entailed some risk. This exhibition is one of several cases that I think warrant further consideration for they may reveal how cultural politics intersected with sexual politics in Gómez Sicre's canon of modern Latin American art.

As for those “threat letters” in the archive, I’ve come to see them as threats in a different sense: they—along with gossip and rumor—pose a threat to the historians’ work if they are left to shape our ideas without our open acknowledgement. They cannot simply be bracketed out of the research, for even if they go unmentioned, they continue to indelibly shape our impressions. That is not to say that rumor and gossip inherently malign the historians’ work. Rumors *do* have value as forms of knowledge, and are especially useful when studying gay cultures pre-Stonewall. Gossip and rumor *are* valuable “in filling the gaps left by the lack of documentary evidence and defensible argumentation.”²⁰

As much as these letters can be seen as a discursive threat, I also believe they present an opportunity to more candidly re-evaluate Gómez Sicre and, ultimately, to muddle the paradigms with which historians have tended to interpret the flows of cultural and political power during the Cold War. There’s no denying that the Cold War brought with it radicalizations and irreconcilable divides—right/left, hawk/dove, capitalist/communist. But reconsidering this invisible history allows us as historians to move beyond the established dichotomies of Cold War history, to see a past that is multi-vocal, complex, and a better representative of everyday life, with its triumphs, ambiguities, and irresolutions.²¹

—Michael Wellen

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¹ Mirta Blanco Padrón, “José Gómez Sicre,” *Vanidades continental*, Vol 16, Issue 7, March 30, 1976, 35. There were countless other artists whose work Gómez Sicre also promoted and sold. Of the many, it is worth mentioning Gómez Sicre’s intense support for the work of Fernando Botero, Enrique Grau, Fernando de Szyszlo, and Alejandro

Otero. He also held an important role in evaluating and promoting modern trends in Cuban art: from the 1930s onwards, he advocated for modern Cuban painters of his generation, especially Cundo Bermúdez, Mario Carreño, Felipe Orlando—all later included in the 1944 exhibition *Cuban Painting of Today* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (a show which Gómez Sicre helped curate). He continued supporting and evaluating art by painters of Cuban descent well into the late 1980s; many of the Cuban and Cuban-American artists that he favored are discussed in his book *Art of Cuba in Exile* (Miami, FL: Ediciones Universal, 1987).

² An annual review, which ran from 1956 to 1973, listing past and upcoming Latin American art exhibitions organized in the Americas and in Europe.

³ Blanco Padrón, 34. “Ni político, ni social, ni económica, no me interesan ninguno de esos factores, siempre que puedan afectar al artista en sí mismo, como creador y mi único credo exacto, es que al artista no puede producirse *sin libertad*.” All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

⁴ Art historians Eva Cockcroft and Shifra Goldman have each singled out Gómez Sicre for promoting a so-called “international-style” of abstraction as the art of the “free world,” and for criticizing art created by left-leaning artists as shallow propaganda. More recently, art historian Alejandro Anreus has offered brief, but more nuanced assessments of Gómez Sicre’s cultural role as a “warrior” of the Cold War. According to Anreus, Gómez Sicre skillfully marshaled together artists working in a diverse set of styles—not simply abstraction—to build a canon of “Latin American art” that would displace the common U.S. associations that define “Latin American art” with Mexican muralism and *indigenismo*. See Alejandro Anreus, “Jose Gómez-Sicre and the ‘Idea’ of Latin American Art,” *Art Journal* (Winter 2005), 83-84. He further develops these ideas in his lectures, including “Teaching it to the Gringos: Jose Gómez Sicre’s Definitions of Latin American Art” delivered at College Art Conference on February 23, 2006, New York, New York.

⁵ Interview with Rebecca Reed, a former editor in chief of *Américas* magazine. July 18, 2007.

⁶ Alejandro Anreus, art historian as well as a former employee and friend of Gómez Sicre’s, has indicated that David Alvaro Siqueiros accused Gómez Sicre of being a spy in his memoirs. In an interview with Gómez Sicre, Anreus asks directly about Siqueiros’ allegation. Alejandro Anreus, “Ultimas conversaciones con José Gómez Sicre,” *ArteFacto* 18 (canícula 2000), n.p.

⁷ A blurred page number on the bottom right corner of the photocopy indicates that it has been transposed from earlier context—perhaps it was an article once included in a larger publication originally created in the 1940s—the youthful photo of Gómez Sicre lends credence to this possibility.

⁸ The story about Lam comes from a source who wishes to remain anonymous. I remain fascinated by the way rumors can nestle into a Scheherazade-like tale: this rumor conveys information—that cannot be confirmed—helping to further explain how the other rumor concerning the movie theater incident may have circulated. José Quiroga, *Tropics of Desire: Interventions from Queer Latino America*. (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2000), 46-47. And Rudi C. Bleys. *Images of Ambiente: Homotextuality and Latino/a American Art, 1810—Today* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2000), 86.

⁹ John D’Emilio, “Homosexual Menace: the Politics of Sexuality in Cold War America” in *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992), 60.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 61. D’Emilio explains that the twenty percent figure comes from Ralph S. Brown, Jr., “Loyalty-Security Measures and Employment Opportunities,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (April 1955): 113-117. Unfortunately the data detailing the number of federal employees who were fired or resigned because of their homosexuality remains imprecise. Historian and activist William Parker explains that “by referring to imprecise periods of time, by using overlapping categories, and by sometimes counting the same figures more than once, government officials have engaged in what the press has called a ‘numbers game.’ Between January 1, 1947 and November 1, 1950, 420 cases of ‘sex perversion’ (121 of them in the State Department) resulted in resignation or dismissal, not including 69 pending cases (of which 12 were in the State Department). Between 1947 and mid-1953, State Department spokesman claim 425 homosexuals resigned or were dismissed. In the period June 1953 through June 1955, according to testimony before a Senate subcommittee of the Committee on the Post Office and Civil Service, there were 837 terminations for “sex perversion” (147 of them in the State Department)...Exact figures for other departments, about which there has been much less concern, are not readily available.” William Parker, “Homosexuals and Employment,” *Essays on Homosexuality*. Essay No. 4, (San Francisco and Washington, D.C.: The Corinthian Foundation et al, 1970), 8.

¹¹ Johnson explains that label “Lavender Scare” is meant “to demonstrate its parallels with the second Red Scare. In 1950s culture, lavender was the color commonly associated with homosexuality, as evidenced in references to the “lavender lads” in the State Department, whereas pink connoted fellow traveling and Communist sympathies. David

K Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 216, n 1.

¹² “Yo estuve a punto de perder me puesto, pero por vía de mi hermano, que era militar, los Auténticos me protegieron.” Anreus, “Últimas Conversaciones con José Gómez Sicre,” n.p.

¹³ Gavin Butt, *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948-1963* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 38-45.

¹⁴ Ibid, 41. Here Gavin Butt is citing Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time* (New York, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1980), 260.

¹⁵ “En ese mismo viaje durante mi exposición en la Galería de la Unión Panamericana en Washington, vi a David Manzur con su pintoresco promotor: el crítico cubano Gómez Sicre, quien orquestaba una secta de artistas homosexuales latinoamericanos. La anécdota es interesante porque a Manzur le estaban grabando un video, y delirante ante las cámaras y los numerosos presentes, se rasgó sus vestiduras y con los dedos se pintó un cuadro en el pecho.” Gonzalo Márquez Cristo and Amparo Osorio, “Conversación con Carlos Granada; la persistencia de la memoria,” *Presencia Comun*, No 13, Bogota, Colombia, 2001. Available online at:

<http://comunpresenciaentrevistas.blogspot.com/2006/12/carlos-granada-entrevista.html> [accessed October 2009]

¹⁶ The notion of gay men leading “double lives” is critically discussed in George Chauncey. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1995).

¹⁷ Several of the artists that Gómez Sicre supported—artists who, to varying degrees considered themselves apolitical—have been written off as pawns in the Cold War struggle; José Luis Cuevas is one case in point. See Shifra M. Goldman, *Contemporary Mexican Painting in a Time of Change*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995 (orig. published University of Texas Press, 1981). Cuevas, as well as other artists such as Félix Ángel, have also been accused of being the beneficiaries of Gómez Sicre’s sexual favoritism. About Félix Ángel, Sergio Esteban Vélez writes that “under the shameless flirting of the old-aged director [Gómez Sicre], some arrived at the erroneous thought that Ángel had a relationship that was more than professional, but it is certain that he never became more than ‘his right-hand man.’” The original statement in Spanish reads: “Debido a la impenitente coquetería del anciano director, algunos llegaron a pensar erradamente que Ángel tenía con él una relación más que profesional, pero lo cierto es que nunca pasó de ser ‘su mano derecha’”. Sergio Esteban Vélez, “Félix Ángel: Perfil de un artista underground,” *El Mundo*, 23 de agosto de 2008, Medellín, Colombia. Available online: <http://sergioestebanvelez.over-blog.es/article-31959169.html> [accessed October 2009].

¹⁸ A fuller discussion of this exhibition and the changing relationship between Cuevas and Gómez Sicre can be found in Claire F. Fox, “The Hemispheric Routes of “El Nuevo Arte Nuestro”: The Pan American Union, Cultural Policy, and the Cold War” in *Hemispheric American Studies* (Caroline F Lavender et al, eds.)(New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 223-248.

¹⁹ Interview with José Luis Cuevas. August 29, 2008. Similarly, in 1954, Cuevas told *Time* magazine that he himself found the city “too orderly and antiseptic for inspiration.”

²⁰ Butt, *Between You and Me*, 18.

²¹ For evidence of this growing desire among historians concerned with Latin America and the Cold War, see Gilbert Joseph et al, eds. *In from the Cold: Latin America’s New Encounter with the Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

—Michael Wellen

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***Error of omission:
Inserting Central American Art into the discourse of Latin American Art History***

Latin American Art History tends to highlight Mexican Muralism and Surrealism, Magical Realism, and/or abstract art movements including Constructivist and Neo-Concrete Art from South America. Examples of this standard approach include Jacqueline Barnitz's *Twentieth Century Art of Latin America* (2001) and Patrick Frank's *Readings in Latin American Modern Art* (2004).¹

The Central American Isthmus has long produced famous authors like Rubén Darío, Miguel Angle Asturias, and Ernesto Cardenal, but more recently the region has become synonymous with under-development, corruption, and violence. In almost every country some form of social injustice, political oppression, foreign intervention, and/or civil war has occurred. Most have been deemed a resource for exploit and served as informal economic colonies of the United States.² Not surprisingly art and culture from this region has been generally overlooked.³

One of the first efforts to present in English a general survey of Latin America Art that does include a discussion of Central American Art is Gilbert Chases' book "Contemporary Art in Latin America" published in 1970. This publication features a chapter entitled "The Caribbean and Central America," however, only Guatemala, Nicaragua and Panama are discussed and in a very limited manner dedicating only twenty of the 274 pages of text to Central American Art. On the other hand, Monica Kupfer's essay "Central America" included in Edward J. Sullivan's *Latin American Art*, first published in 1996 and revised with a second edition in 2000, is more inclusive addressing all six of the Spanish-speaking countries of the Central American Isthmus. Although Kupfer provides an insightful summary of the history of art of Guatemala, Honduras,

El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama the discussion is reduced to one chapter, which only allows for a brief discussion of any one country.

Barnitz explains the omission of Central American artists (as well as those from Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Paraguay) from her 2001 book “Twentieth-Century Art of Latin America” as a: “choice . . . dictated by the fact that before the 1970s, the art of these countries offered no new paradigms and, in some cases, followed the Mexican model.” Yet in 1987 Barnitz criticized this type of approach in the exhibition catalogue entitled “Latin American Artists in New York since 1970” stating:

Until the early seventies, the main centers of control were in the United States and Western Europe. After the late fifties and especially in the sixties, Latin America was subordinated to this authority, and its art was evaluated according to prescribed standards. As a result, Latin American artists were often criticized for their apparent lack of formal originality.⁴

No one person is accountable for the general omission of Central American Art from Latin American Art History. Ultimately the frequent omission of Central American Art from Latin American Art History is due to numerous issues including complexity of travel across the region resulting in limited access to and across the Central American Isthmus, political upheaval and strife in the region, scarcity of published information on the topic, and the lack of economic and institutional support to explore and develop the topic. Yet, although Barnitz herself seemingly prescribed standards that served to justify the exclusion of Central American Art from her scholarly efforts and publications, it is Barnitz herself that provides the arguments that support its inclusion and the exploration of what makes it distinctive. In her 1987 text Barnitz championed individual experience as a source of distinction: “[T]he way in which Latin Americans perceive the world differs from that of their North American colleagues. Although they may have derived their styles from similar sources, their frame of reference often remains

linked to their own personal experience.”⁵. I would add that the same could be said regarding Central America, which makes the argument for the inclusion and exploration of Central American art as distinct in its representation of individual experience.

My interest in Central American Art was sparked by two simultaneous seminars offered by David Craven, Distinguished Professor of Art History in the Department of Art and Art History at the University of New Mexico that took place in Spring 2008 and Fall 2008.⁶ These seminars produced a working group focused on investigating and developing material on Central American Art and Culture. The group is mentored and advised by David Craven and consists of myself; Cesar Estrada, Ph.D. Student, Department of Art and Art History, University of New Mexico; Shana Klein, Ph.D. Student, Department of Art History & Archaeology, University of Maryland; and Gustavo Larach, M.A. Candidate, Department of Art and Art History, University of New Mexico. Presently we are in the process of identifying material previously published in Spanish for translation into English that we believe crucial to developing an understanding and appreciation of Central American Art. Additionally, under the direction and advisement of David Craven my colleagues in the Department of Art and Art History at the University of New Mexico are developing new scholarship on Central American artists. In 2006 Brenna Drury wrote her M.A. Thesis, which examines the work of Guatemalan artists Regina José Galindo and Nicaraguan artist Patricia Belli; in the spring of 2009 Cesar Estrada completed his M.A. Thesis on Guatemalan artist G. Carlos Merida and his portfolio “Estampas del Popol Vuh”; and Gustavo LaRache is currently writing on his M.A. thesis on Nicaraguan artist Armando Morales’s 1993 portfolio “The Saga of Sandino.” Their efforts speak to a burgeoning new area of study at the University of New Mexico.

The objective for this paper is to present a range of issues that inform and impact Central American art and its history in an effort to draw attention to a rich and under-examined area of study in Art History. Following Barnitz' model for Latin American Art History this paper introduces and highlights trends and themes in Central American Art, which reveal correlation and diversity between South American Art and Central American Art.⁷ The parallels between the two regions are not a measure for dismissing the later as derivative or deficient. Rather it provides a course for locating Central American art within Latin American Art History. An abbreviated discussion of exhibition practices and the Isthmus Biennial will consider their potential impact on Central American Art History. Issues that arise and inform any investigation of Central American Art include social and political issues of Central America; the trans-regional relationship between the six countries of the Central American Isthmus, as well as the region's relationship with the rest of the Western Hemisphere; and the lack of institutions and resources related to the study of art in Central America.

Parallels in Central American and South American Art

The following presents a brief overview of the history of Central American art with a focus on the similarities and differences between South America and Central America.

[image-Catherwood] During the nineteenth century traveling artists, including Frederick Catherwood, were in Central America and South America documenting and illustrating their interpretations of the landscape and indigenous cultures. Comparable too are the types of patrons and the subjects of art that were popular throughout the nineteenth century in both regions. In Central America it was a local land-owning bourgeoisie that commissioned portraits, landscapes, and historical paintings. [image] Academic models and European trends were

introduced to Central America and South America by European artists and local artists trained in Europe who established art academies in their local countries.⁸ Barnitz explains the distinctive application in the Americas of European styles when she writes:

“Latin American artists who went abroad saw several styles or types of art all at once rather than as they had developed sequentially over a period of several decades in Europe. As a result, they often synthesized these multiple styles in their work rather than follow the specific characteristics of a single style.”⁹

Although she was primarily speaking of developments in South America, somewhat the same can be said of Central America. Examples of the application of European styles is evident in the images shown here. The image at the top far left is by Carlos Alberto Imery a Salvadorean artist who studied in Europe and then returned home to established the first art academy in El Salvador where he served as director between 1911-1949. Imery’s students, two of whom are represented here in the center and at the bottom right, focused on indigenous themes and national identity while engaging European aesthetics.

[image-comparison Nicaraguan and Mexican art] Central American art throughout the twentieth century has been greatly impacted, at times stunted and censored, by colonial domination, dictatorships, and civil wars.¹⁰ In the 1930s and 1940s economic and political issues throughout Central America result in artists turning to Mexican art as a socially relevant model, whose importance continued on throughout the twentieth century.¹¹ My dissertation project investigates the impact of Mexican art on Central American art. The images shown here illustrate the similarity between Mexican and Central American visual language in its address of social political issues. Both images depict the re-construction phase of a nation after civil war and each displays a visual language that correlates with the ideology and efforts of a new government.¹²

It isn't until the 1940s and 1950s that Central American artists truly develop more contemporary visual languages. In this vein Raul Quintanilla, a Nicaraguan artist has stated:

We were, and in a way continue to be, the generation of artists that consciously embarked on the construction of a new visual language. . . [W]e looked in a newly liberated way at the Eurocentric nature of much contemporary art. We clearly did not want to be an appendix of or a benign tumor on these so-called 'international centers' of the arts, as we also did not intend to 'otherize' ourselves . . . or to serve the demands of the Western art transnationals for touristic ethnic eccentricities. We wanted and began to construct a new visual language that was national and yet also internationalist.¹³

In Central America, as in South America, the appropriation and incorporation of European styles and trends were often combined with the geographic, political, and cultural elements specific to the region resulting in a distinctive visual language. Recognition and comprehension of this language demands examination and address for a clear understanding of the historiography and narrative of Central American art. Although this is an investigation still needing to be undertaken, I will present recent developments in themes and trends in Central America.

Themes and Trends in Central American Art

Identifying significant themes and trends in Central American art is work that needs to be done.

However, there have been some early and significant efforts that have laid the ground work.

David Craven has written extensively about Nicaraguan art. His in-depth examination of art from Nicaragua served to initially introduce the English-speaking world to Nicaraguan art and also provides insight into the trends and styles that have developed.¹⁴ Nicaraguan artist Rodrigo Peñalba (1908-1979) studied in Europe and served as the director the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes in Nicaragua. In Peñalba's work cultural identity and landscapes were illustrated in an expressive style, which resulted in a fusion between regionally specific content and European

aesthetics. This hybrid approach to visual language served as a model to Peñalba's students, such as Armando Morales (1927) who combined abstraction and figuration in images that referenced his native home and Nicaraguan history. Artists in the Nicaraguan collective "Praxis," founded in 1963 and dissolving in 1972, were also students of Peñalba. Their efforts against the social injustices of the Somoza regime combined abstraction and forms of Pre-Columbian Nicaraguan art.¹⁵ The painter Roger Pérez de la Rocha (b 1949) became a member of Praxis in 1971 and is responsible for introducing painting to the Solentiname community. Solentiname primitivist painting refers to the location this style developed out of, which is the parish established in 1965 on the island of Mancarrón in the Solentiname archipelago of Lagos de Nicaragua, and to the nonprofessional and spontaneous nature of this approach.¹⁶ Liberation theology, which emphasizes social justice and communal sharing served as the foundation for the development of the Solentiname community, which was encouraged by Padre Ernesto Cardenal, a priest who in 1979 served as Minister of Culture in Nicaragua. Solentiname art incorporates popular art forms, such as weavings and painted gourds, and illustrates local landscapes illustrating daily life and biblical episodes. Unique to this style are the overlapping forms, even lighting, and a tactile nature, as well as the depiction of Christ as an ordinary laborer and the non-hierarchical illustration of figures in relation to one another and nature.

In El Salvador artist Carlos Alberto Imery (1879-1949) studied in Europe and then returned home to establish and serve as director (1911-1949) at the first art academy. His students focused on indigenous themes and national identity while engaging European aesthetics.

Guatemalan artist Carlos Mérida's work combined Surrealism and geometric abstraction with Mayan art and Guatemalan popular culture.¹⁷

[images??] One trend developing in Central American art is the application of new technologies.¹⁸ Ernesto Calvo and María José Monge have recently published an essay on the development of new technologies in Central America. Although focused on efforts by the Costa Rican Museum of Contemporary Art and Design and Costa Rican artists, this essay provides an inclusive list of forty Central American artists that engage documentation of performances and/or video art, which includes video installation and animation, whose topics range from politics to identity and anthropology to literature.¹⁹ Monica Kupfer, Founder and Director of the Panamanian Biennial has also noted that since 1999 there has been a rise in non-traditional media submissions to the Panamanian Biennial that include computer art, video art, net or web art, and installations.²⁰ She explains that lack of art schools, along with exposure through the internet and study abroad, has stimulated the incorporation of new technologies in Panamanian art. Many of the young artists today come from professional backgrounds like publicity, photography, film, animation, and architecture. These Panamanian artists take advantage of creative opportunities allowed them through their professional environments and their art reflects the resources available to them. Calvo and Monge note that what is lacking in the development of new technologies in Central America is training, technological tools, and financial support for artistic events that emphasize new technologies. The work by artists discussed in Calvo and Monge's essay speak to Central American artists exploring innovative and non-traditional media in the development of a distinctive visual language.

Typically Central American artists and curators do not focus their efforts on the violence and turbulence in their countries, due primarily to the lack of interest by patrons of the arts and perhaps also because it is too painful to remember. However, there are exceptions that include

artistic and curatorial projects that function as icons of remembrance and when examined as a whole serve to link Central American Art with that of South America, as well as elucidate the distinctive approach by Central American artists.²¹

[image-Where are you detaining them?] I In Guatemala, 200,000 people died or Disappeared during the Civil War that lasted from 1960 until 1996.²² Laurel Reuter informs that: "‘Disappear’ evolved into a transitive verb describing those considered threats to the state who were kidnapped, tortured, and killed by their own military."²³ According to the Historical Clarification Commission, which was charged with investigating human rights violations during the more than 35 years of civil war in Guatemala, “the army [which translates into the government] was responsible for 93 percent of all massacres, tortures, disappearances, and killings . . .”²⁴ The Commission also accused the United States Central Intelligence Agency of sponsoring illegal state operations.

[image-Huellas] Performance is one of the most potent forms engaged by Guatemalan artists in their commentaries on a history of corruption and violence in Central America, which challenges the image of Central Americans as victims. Guatemalan artist Regina Galindo’s work is a self-described process of symbolic performance and poetic writing.²⁵ Brenna Drury writes: “the work of . . . Galindo represents the . . . oppressed and engages in a dialogue with . . . history in the hopes of raising awareness [through] . . . drastic measures. For when an artist makes work related to her body in Guatemala, it strikes an emphatic cord with human rights abuses.” In 2003 Galindo performed *Quien Puede Borrar las Huellas (Who can erase the traces)* a silent memorial for all those who perished during the Civil War in Guatemala. She walked barefoot from the National- Palace to the Constitutional Court in Guatemala City. **[image]** She carried a bowl of blood, which she periodically set on the ground. After stepping into the bowl, she would

resume her journey, which resulted in a bloody trail of footprints in the street. This performance was a direct response to the decision by the Constitutional Court to allow former military dictator, General Ríos Montt, to run for president.

[image- Huellas] Galindo's performance communicates her objections to the Guatemalan government's disrespect of those who perished as a result of institutionalized mass genocide. She marked the presence of those absent as her bloody footprints stained the streets with the memory of the nation's historic atrocities. Galindo's international reputation helps to inform and bring attention to these issues in Guatemala.

[image-title] Guatemalan curator Rossina Cazali organized a two day performance event entitled *Los Desaparecidos, Horror Vacui*, which took place at the Centro de Formación in Guatemala in 2008. The series of performances, also identified by Cazali as actions and interventions, that made up the event focused on aspects of Guatemala's history of political repression and the Disappeared. The event was organized as a response to the exhibition *Los Desaparecidos*, which was curated by Laurel Reuter at the Museum of North Dakota and traveled the world between 2005 and 2008. *Los Desaparecidos* displayed artistic responses and commentaries on the history of the *Disappeared* in Latin America.²⁶ In philosophy horror vacui (literally: fear of empty spaces, also known as cenophobia) refers to a theory initially proposed by Aristotle (384 BCE – 322 BCE) stating that nature abhors a vacuum. Many of the artist projects in *Los Desaparecidos, Horror Vacui* attempted to fill the void created by the *Disappeared*.

[image-Benchoam] Stefan Benchoam's contribution to Cazali's program was a work entitled "Nunca ha estado tan presente como cuando no está (or Never been more present as when not here)". The words in the title were spelled out in saw dust at the entrance of the space

where the event occurred. As people passed through the gates into the space, the saw dust was lifted and removed, until IT disappeared. As there was no other entry points into the space, those that came to see or involved in the performances were forced to participate and implicated in erasing or disappearing the words. Benchoam's work communicates multiple messages. One possible interpretation is that all of humanity is implicated when nations are allowed to annihilate their own people. Another possible point is that every effort to fill the void created by political corruption and genocide is ephemeral and futile.

Exhibition Practices and the Central American Isthmus

Exhibition practices are crucial in terms of access to art, comprehension of cultural and identity politics, and the construction of art history and aesthetics. Thus, when talking about Central American Art one must consider and address how exhibition practices in Latin America, the United States, and abroad affect the scholarly practices of Latin American Art Historians.

Cazali's exhibition *Horror Vacui* was not only a commentary on Guatemala's own history of the *Disappeared*, but also a response to the fact that in the Museum of North Dakota's exhibition there was only one artist from Central America included. This speaks to the long history of indifference to Central American art, which is usually omitted from any discussions, exhibitions, and/or publications that address Latin American art in general. This point is corroborated by an examination of the history of Latin American art exhibitions in the United States and their catalogues, the more significant being: *Latin American Artists in New York Since 1970* (1987), *Art of the Fantastic: Latin American Art, 1920-1987* (1987), *The Latin American Spirit* (1988), *Art in Latin America* (1989), *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century* (1993). These exhibition catalogues are important contributors to Latin American Art History as

they make up a large number of the publications one finds on Latin American art and the exclusion of Central American art has only served to further perpetuate this as a standard approach. However, efforts are being made by Central American art institutions and curators to organize exhibitions and produce publications that document and draw attention to Central American art.²⁷ Yet, when publications are produced through these efforts they tend to be limited in number and are often not circulated internationally. An exception is the Central American Biennial catalogues, but an issue that arises is the commercial slant, which raises a point regarding the impact of commercial entities on Latin American Art History in general.

The Central American Isthmus Biennial

The first Isthmus Biennial, which I will also refer to as a regional biennial, took place in Guatemala in 1998 and has since rotated successively in Costa Rica (2000), Nicaragua (2002), Panama (2004), and El Salvador (2006).²⁸ In 2008 the sixth biennial hosted in Honduras marked the ten year anniversary of the Central American Biennial. The process of selection for the regional biennial involves individual country or local competitions. The six participating countries send six artists apiece to the Isthmus Biennial. Participants from Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua are prize winners of local Biennials; in the case of El Salvador and Panama selection competitions are organized.²⁹ Corporate sponsors support both the Isthmus Biennial and the local competitions. The regional biennial with its alternating venues, allows for the various distinctive patrons to rotate sponsorship. The corporate sponsors include Promérica Bank, Industrialists for Art of Costa Rica, Paiz Foundation for Education and Culture of Guatemala, Honduarte of Honduras, Ortiz Gurdíán Foundation of Nicaragua, and

Fernández Pirla Foundation of Panama.³⁰ The responsibilities of organizing the event are rotated between arts organizations within each host country.³¹

In the first Isthmus Biennial catalogue Rossina Cazali ends her essay on Guatemalan Art by astutely asking the question, “What is the purpose of a biennial.” The Isthmus Biennial represents a grand undertaking of cooperation and effort between individuals, organizations, and corporations from six countries. The intent of organizers of the Isthmus Biennial is to create a space where creators can be recognized and valued.³² More importantly the regional biennial provides exposure to those that participate and attempts to assert a place for Central American art and artists in the international arena. Additionally, in a region where support for the arts is meager and resources for the arts inadequate the local competitions and regional biennial provide a space and venue where artists can show their talent, get feedback on their work, meet one another and engage in a dialogue with their peers. Ultimately, the Isthmus Biennial and the local competitions fill a void that exists for many artists, curators, and scholars.

The advancement of technologically based mediums is also a result of the regional biennial, which as previously addressed, is driven by the artists themselves. Although the criteria for submissions for the second regional biennial continued to be painting, a photograph was awarded a prize. For the third Isthmus Biennial the first prize winner was Panamanian artist Brooke Alfaro for *Aria* and *Yutri*, two 3.40-minute videos; the second prize was awarded to Ramon Zafrani's photography and sound installation; and Nicaraguan Patricia Belli's two 3.30-minute videos entitled for *Sisiphus* and *Resiliencia* won third prize.³³ The organizers of the Isthmus Biennial eventually expanded the criteria for submissions allowing for the inclusion of bi-dimensional or three-dimensional formats, including sculpture, art object assembly, video art,

animations, net art, artistic photography, etc. Thus artists have played a major role in dictating the definition of art within the context of the Isthmus Biennial, which inevitably impacts the rest of the region.

What is gained and by whom when certain artists are awarded participation in the Isthmus Biennial? is the unavoidable question that comes up when considering the role of the corporate sponsors and commercial galleries. The objective of the organizers of the regional biennial comes into question with the realization that the majority of those involved in the development, organization, and selection of artists is affiliated with the corporate sponsors and/or commercial galleries. The infrastructure for the individual country competitions, which determines participation in the Isthmus Biennial, was established and continues to be managed by the organizers of the regional biennial. Ramiro Ortiz of the Ortiz Gurdíán Foundation is a major player in the development and organization of the Isthmus Biennial and individual country competitions. He is Nicaraguan, works to promote the arts, personally owns a large collection of art, is a share holder of Promérica Bank, and has connections to an art gallery in Miami.³⁴

Most individuals involved in the coordination of the local competitions were and are hand selected by Isthmus Biennial organizers and are also affiliated with the corporate sponsors for the events and commercial galleries.³⁵ In Costa Rica Industrialists for the Arts formed for the sole purpose of providing support for Costa Rican artists to participate in the Central American Biennial. In El Salvador, a gallery owner was brought in to organize the local competition and Ortiz coordinated sponsorship for the event from Promérica Bank. In Honduras, Bonnie Garcia, the owner of Galeria Portales was charged with forming a committee to select the six Honduran artists to participate in the regional biennial. Eventually, when Garcia stopped participating in

the process, Ortiz worked to organize a local biennial, which first took place in 2005, as well as procured sponsorship from Promérica Bank for the event. In Nicaragua Juanita Bermudez, a gallery owner was asked to establish a biennial. In Panama the Isthmus Biennial organizers asked Carmen Aleman, the owner of a gallery named Arte Consult, to assist in the selection process of artists for which she has created a committee and Fernández Pirla Foundation sponsors the local event.

The potentially non-objective nature of selection for participation in the Isthmus Biennial is made evident if one examine the case of the local selection process in Panama. Prior to the establishment of the Isthmus Biennial and the local Panamanian selection competition there already existed the Panamanian Biennial, which was founded in 1992 by Irene Escoffery (†) and Monica Kupfer. Escoffery and Kupfer approached Aleman, who was charged with the development of the local selection competition, to use the Panamanian Biennial as the vehicle for the selection of participants in the Isthmus Biennial. Aleman chose to do otherwise and instead created a committee. As information is not public it is unclear who is on the committee and involved in the selection process, but it is understood that these individuals are associated with Aleman's gallery.³⁶

It could be argued that the local selection process(es) are directed or impacted by the corporate sponsors' and commercial galleries' interests, all of whom benefit from the elevated value each artist and their work gains when identified as a prize winner in a local competition and included in the Isthmus Biennial. This leads to contemplation in terms of the Isthmus Biennial and its impact on Central American Art History. With so few sources on Central American art the value and impact of an event like the Isthmus Biennial and its catalogue

becomes great, which can and most likely has affected the Central American art scene and its narrative. What seems necessary to balance the role of the Isthmus Biennial is the development of more scholars and publications focused on Central American art.

Conclusion

Political and social conflicts has left most countries of the Central American Isthmus in disarray and greatly eradicated any infrastructure that can support, collect, or display art. In countries where people are simply trying to rebuild their lives, the arts do not take priority, which raises the question, who is responsible for the economic support, development, and promotion of the arts? Institutions in the region that could train art historians, house libraries, and serve as a space to promote the study and development of Central American Art History are practically non-existent. Efforts are being made to shift this reality, which include Guatemalan curator Rossina Cazali's work to establish a research institute in Guatemala in collaboration with the Spanish Embassy, Patricia Belli's art school in Nicaragua EspIRA / La ESPORA, and the recent purchase of Panamanian curator and scholar Monica Kupfer's personal library by the University of New Mexico.

The Association for Latin American Art's Webpage lists approximately forty-two institutions in the United States that offer graduate programs in Latin American Art History. Of the eighty-five scholars listed at these institutions, only one is identified as a specialist on Central American Art History.³⁷ Central American Art is long over due attention. This paper raises the call for Latin American art scholars and programs to recognize, write, and teach about Central American art. An accurate and rigorous approach in the study of the distinct developments and

contributions to the arts in Central America is imperative if Central American art is going to be part of the dialogue that is Latin American Art History. The long-term aim is to facilitate increased recognition and understanding of art from Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama inside and outside of the academy.

Endnotes

¹ For more examples I suggest perusing the list of books on Latin American Art noted by Jacqueline Barnitz, *Twentieth Century Art of Latin America* (The University of Texas Press, 2004) 315, Endnote 1 noted below that are listed chronologically and include some minor additions. Although Barnitz herself notes that these publications are fragmentary, she does identify them as contributing to an understanding of Latin American modern art and I would add they, in addition to her survey text *Twentieth Century Art of Latin America* are the foundation of Latin American Art History.

- 1969, Leopoldo Castedo, *A History of Latin American Art*
1970, Gilbert Chase, *Contemporary Art in Latin America*
1974, Damián Bayón, *Aventura plástica de Hispanoamérica*
1985, Damián Bayón, *Arte moderno de América Latina*
1987, Jacqueline Barnitz, Janis Bergman-Carton, and Florencia Bazzano Nelson, *Latin American Artists in New York Since 1970*, Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery, The University of Texas at Austin.
1987, Holliday Day and Hollister Sturges, *Art of the Fantastic: Latin American Art, 1920-1987* (exhib. cat.)
1988, Leopoldo Castedo, *Historia del arte iberoamericano*
1988, Luis R. Cancel, *The Latin American Spirit*
1989, Dawn Ades, *Art in Latin America* (exhib. cat.)
1993, Edward Lucie-Smith, *Latin American Art of the Twentieth Century*
1993, Waldo Rasmussen, Fatima Bercht, and Elizabeth Ferrer, eds., *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century* (exhib. cat.)
1996, Edward J. Sullivan (multi-authored), *Latin American Art in the Twentieth Century*
2001, Jacqueline Branitz, *Twentieth Century Art of Latin America*
2002, David Craven, *Art and Revolution in Latin America, 1910-1990*.
2004, Patrick Frank, *Readings in Latin American Modern Art*

² Here I want to clarify that most of the countries of Central America have often been 'informal colonies' in an economic sense and that I recognize that, except for the Canal Zone in Panama, they have not been 'formal colonies' in the established political sense. See Harry Magdoff, *The Age of Imperialism* (New York, 1969) for his discussion of the three phases of imperialism, which identifies the final phase as industrial resulting in informal colonies. My introduction to issues pertaining to imperialism and informal colonies, as well as to Magdoff's work, was in a seminar led by David Craven, Distinguished Professor of Art History, "Imperialism," University of New Mexico, Spring of 2006.

³ Exceptions include work produced by Central American artists and scholars, however, much of this material is in Spanish, primarily circulated in their country of origin, and nearly impossible to locate or access in the United States. Another exception is the scholarly writings of David Craven, Distinguished Professor of Art History, Department of Art and Art History, University of New Mexico who has written extensively on Nicaraguan art.

⁴ Jacqueline Barnitz, *Latin American Artists in New York Since 1970* (Archer M. Huntington Art, 1987) 1.

⁵ Barnitz, *Latin American Artists in New York Since 1970*, 19.

⁶ The Spring Seminar included an investigation of the relationship between Central America and Mexico, a concentrated examination of the history and art of six Spanish-speaking countries of the isthmus (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama), and a bibliographic investigation of publications and essays focused on Central American Art. What became evident is that attention to Central American Art is lacking and that there is minimal material available on the topic, particularly in English, which speaks to the continual omission of Central American Art in Latin American Art History.

As part of the Fall seminar course Rossina Cazali a Guatemalan curator, art critic, and scholar; Monica Kupfer the founding director of the Panamanian Biennial, a curator, and art historian; and Patricia Belli a Nicaraguan artist and scholar were invited by David Craven to the University of New Mexico to present public lectures and meet with students. These presentations and discussions were a rare opportunity to hear about and discuss the current situation regarding art and culture in Central America and speak with individuals that are actually involved in creating, curating, and writing about Central American Contemporary Art.

⁷ The primary source for the brief address of nineteenth and early twentieth century developments in Central American Art is Monica Kupfer, "Central America," *Latin American Art in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Edward J. Sullivan (1996) 52-53.

⁸ For the history of the development of art academies in the Central American Isthmus see Monica Kupfer, "Central America," *Latin American Art in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Edward J. Sullivan (1996) **Guatemala** 53: "The first art schools were established by two immigrants: the academic Spanish painters Justo de Gandarias and the Venezuelan sculptor Santiago González. Their students included Rafael Rodríguez Padilla (1890-1929), who founded Guatemala's official Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes in 1920 (later renamed Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas) where most of the country's modern artists began their careers."; on **Honduras**, 59-60: "The first art school in Tegucigalpa was founded in 1890 by the immigrant European painter Tomás Mur, but was short-lived and did not produce artists of merit."; on **El Salvador**: 61: Carlos Alverto Imery (1879-1949) founded and directed between 1911 to 1949 "El Salvador's first art academy, the Escuela de Dibujo y Pintura, later renamed Escuela Nacional de Artes Gráficas." "The country's second major art school was founded by the much admired Spanish painter Valero Lecha (1894-1976). For the next forty years, until the school closed in 1968, Lecha was responsible for training (with strict adherence to academic standards), many of the artists who would shape modern Salvadoran art."; on **Nicaragua**, 67: "Modern art in Nicaragua began in 1948 with the return from Europe of Rodrigo Peñalba (1908-1979) who, as Director of the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, was responsible for training several generations of artists, promoting in them the freedom to experiment with content and technique."; on **Costa Rica** 71: "the nation's first art academy, the Escuela de Bellas Artes, was established in San José in 1897 under the direction of the Spanish neo-classical painters Tomás Povedano (1857-1943)."; on **Panama**, 74: "As Directors of Panama's first art academy from 1913 until mid-century, [Robert] Lewis and his successor Humberto Ivaldi (1909-1947) educated a generation of artists.".

⁹ Barnitz, *Twentieth Century Art of Latin America*, 14-15.

¹⁰ Dictatorships in the region include Estrada Cabrera (1898-1920) and Jorge Ubico (1931-1944) in Guatemala, Tiburcio Carías in Honduras (1932-1949), Hernández Martínez in El Salvador (1931-1944), the Somoza family in Nicaragua (1937-1979), and the military governments of Omar Torrijos and Manuel Antonio Noriega in Panama (1968-1989). Civil wars occurred in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. A more detailed address of the above can be found in Thomas E. Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, "Central America: Colonialism, Dictatorships, and Revolution," (Oxford University Press, 1997) 321-358.

¹¹ Kupfer, "Central America," 52.

¹² The title and image of the Mexican print directly reference contributions made by Obregón and Calles during their distinctive presidencies in the areas of building and education. During Obregón's presidency, federal spending on education and the construction of rural schools and public libraries increased. During Calles' administration 1,000 new schools were added to the federal government's rural education system. In addition to listing accomplishments of both men's administrations, the text labels their governments as revolutionary, which raises the issue of post-revolutionary governments and their relationships to the Mexican Revolution. In the image, women and men are represented as equally involved in the betterment of society.

The scene in the background suggests the concept of "action pedagogy," learning through doing, which was adopted by the Ministry of Education (SEP) during the Calles administration. For instance, construction trade was taught to campesinos through the construction of their own school buildings, according to plans supplied to them by the SEP.¹² Thus, the men who appear involved in various tasks of construction can be interpreted as engaged in a process of educational self-empowerment, as they erect a school building. The fact that there are no regional or geographic specific references may very likely speak to the widespread nature of Obregon's and Calles's educational programs. Additionally, the active task of construction alludes to the theme of nation building.

¹³ Raul Quintanilla, "A suspended dialogue: The Nicaraguan Revolution and the visual arts." *Third Text* 7:24 (1993) 26.

¹⁴ See David Craven, "Nicaragua's Revolution in Culture," *Arts Magazine* 58:5 (January 1983) 83-86; David Craven, "Art and Culture in Nicaragua," *Oxford Art Journal* 11:7 (Summer 1988) 51-63; David Craven, "Art in Contemporary Nicaragua," *Oxford Art Journal* 11: 1 (1988) 51-63; *The New Concept of Art and Popular Culture in Nicaragua Since the Revolution in 1979* (Lewiston, 1989); David Craven, "The State of Cultural Democracy in Cuba and Nicaragua during the 1980s," *Latin American Perspectives* 17:3 (Summer, 1990) 100-119; and David Craven, "The Nicaraguan Revolution (1979-1990)," *Art and Revolution in Latin America, 1910-1990* (New Haven and London, 2002) 117-175.

¹⁵ For an in-depth discussion of Nicaraguan history and the Somoza regime see Tom Barry and Deb Preusch, "Nicaragua," *The Central America Fact Book* (Grove Press, 1986) 269-298.

¹⁶ For a detailed discussion of Solentiname Primitivist Painting see David Craven, "Protorevolutionary Developments prior to 1979," *Art and Revolution in Latin America, 1910-1990*, (2002) 125-127 and David Craven, "Solentiname primitivist painting." *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*. 9 Oct. 2009
<http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T079620>.

¹⁷ See Cesar Estrada, "Carlos Merida and Estampas del Popul Vuh," Master's Thesis, University of New Mexico, 2009.

¹⁸ For the most up to date discussion of new technologies in art in Central America see Ernesto Calvo and María José Monge, "New Technologies in Central American Contemporary Art: A Partial Archaeology and Some Critical Appreciations from the Institutional Realm," *Third Text* 23:3 (May 2009) 281-292.

¹⁹ Interestingly many of the artists discussed in the article have participated in the Central American Biennial, which raises the issue of the role of the Biennial on contemporary Central American art. The forty artists named include (in order of presentation in essay): Brooke Alfaro (Panama), Joaquín Rodríguez del Paso (Costa Rica), Priscilla Monge (Costa Rica), Lucía Madriz (Costa Rica), Donna Conlon (American living in Panama), Sandra Monterroso (Guatemala), Regina Galindo (Guatemala), Karla Solano, Natacha Pachano (NY based / Costa Rica), Ana de Vicente (Spanish living in Costa Rica), Cynthia Soto (Costa Rica, living in Switzerland), Patricia Belli (Nicaragua), Alan Omar Mairena (Honduras), Álvaro Sanchez (Honduras), Paulina Velásquez (Costa Rica), Danilo Girón (El Salvador), Ramsés Giovanni (Panama), Hugo Ochoa (Honduras), José Alberto Hernández (Costa Rica), Alejandro Ramírez (Costa Rica), Jonathan Harker (Panama), Clea Eppelin (Costa Rica), Ana Luisa Sánchez (Panama), Enrique Castro (Panama), Regina Aguilar, Guillermo Vargas/Habacuc (Costa Rica), Ernesto Salmerón (Nicaragua), Adán Vallecillo (Honduras), Leonardo González (Honduras), Gabriel Galeano (Honduras), Wilbert Carmona (Nicaragua), Rodrigo Pacheles (Nicaragua), Aníbal López (Guatemala), Alejandro Paz (Guatemala), José Osorio y Rodolfo (Guatemala), Patirica Villalobos (Nicaragua), Christian Bermúdez (Costa Rica), Naufus Ramírez (Honduras, living in Canada), Humberto Vélez (Panama, living in England), and Jorge Albán (Costa Rica).

²⁰ Monica Kupfer, personal interview, October 23, 2009.

²¹ Luis Camnitzer, "Art and Dishonor," Lecture series in conjunction with the exhibition *Los Desparecidos*, SITE Santa Fe, Santa Fe, NM, November 13, 2007. Camnitzer discussed his work "Uruguayan Torture Series," thirty-five etchings that provide potent visual testimony to the horrors of war. Within this context Camnitzer spoke of art as icons of remembrance that inform about and/or keep alive the reality of suffering that accompanies dictatorial governments and war, which history so often omits or denies.

²² My source for this report is Elizabeth Hampsten, "The World Stage," *The Disappeared / Los Desaparecidos* (North Dakota Museum of Art, 2006) 20 who compiled data on The

Disappeared and human rights violations in Latin America from websites such as Amnesty International, Americas Watch, and Radio Netherlands. These numbers come from a report published on February 26, 1999 by the Historical Clarification Commission, which was charged with investigating human rights violations during more than 35 years of civil war in Guatemala. In the same vein, Tom Barry and Deb Preusch, "Guatemala" *The Central America Fact Book* (Grove Press, 1986) 242 provide these statistics: "A [*Bitter and Cruel*] report issued in 1985 by the British Parliamentary Human Rights Group . . . summarized Guatemala's political reality: 100,000 killed since 1960, 100 political assassinations a month in 1984, 10 disappearances a week in 1984, and the presence of 100,000 orphans and 500,000 displaced in Guatemala."

²³ Laurel Reuter, "The Disappeared." *The Disappeared / Los Desaparecidos* (North Dakota Museum of Art, 2006) 25.

²⁴ Hampsten, 20.

²⁵ Brenna Caitlin Drury, *Disquieting the structures: In the work of Regina José Galindo, Patricia Belli, and Joane Cardinal-Schubert*. M.A Thesis, University of New Mexico, 2006, 11.

²⁶ The Disappeared brings together the work of twenty-seven living artists from South America who, over the course of the last thirty years, have made art about los desaparecidos or the disappeared. These artists have lived through the horrors of the military dictatorships that rocked their countries in the mid-decades of the twentieth century. Some worked in the resistance; some had parents or siblings who were disappeared; others were forced into exile. The youngest were born into the aftermath of those dictatorships. And still others live in countries maimed by endless civil war. Disappearance was inevitably linked to torture. North Dakota Museum of Art Webpage, "The Disappeared."

<http://www.commark.com/ndmoa/PastEx/Disappeared/index.html> March 5, 200

²⁷ In the past five years the Asociación Museo de Arte de El Salvador or MARTE has produced a number of exhibitions and publications on and around Salvadorean artists including (listed in chronological order): Luis Croquer, *Rosa Mena Valenzuela. Transformaciones, Provocaciones y Diálogos* (San Salvador: Asociación Museo de Arte Moderno de El Salvador, 2004); Béliqica Rodríguez, *Carlos Cañas: Obras Sobre Papel, 1944-2004* (San Salvador: Asociación Museo de Arte Moderno de El Salvador, 2004); Astrid Bahamond, *Camilo Minero: La Poesía del Testimonio* (Asociación Museo de Arte Moderno de El Salvador, 2005); Miguel Huezo Mixco, et al, *Disparates: Toño Salazar* (San Salvador: MARTE, Asociación Museo de Arte Moderno de El Salvador, 2005); Jorge Palomo, *Realidades y expresiones: tendencias en la pintura salvadoreña, 1970-1995* (San Salvador: Museo de Arte de El Salvador, 2006); Ricardo Lindo, Ana Urquilla, Jorge Palomo, and Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, *Salarrué: El último señor de los mares* (San Salvador: MARTE, Asociación Museo de Arte de El Salvador, 2006); *Sin límites: pintura española y salvadoreña para un nuevo siglo* (San Salvador: Museo de Arte de El Salvador, 2007); Jorge Palomo and Carlos Cañas Dinarte. *reVISIONES: Encuentros con el Arte Salvadoreño*. San Salvador: Museo de Arte de El Salvador, 2007.

²⁸ For the term regional I am applying the second or 1989 edition of the Online Oxford English Dictionary definition 5c: An area of the world made up of neighboring countries that,

from an international point of view, are considered socially, economically, or politically interdependent.

As I have not attended any of the Isthmus Biennials and it is difficult to access the catalogues on the Isthmus Biennials my primary sources for this discussion are: Monica Kupfer, personal interview, October 23, 2009; *First Painting Biennial of the Central American Isthmus*, Exhibition Catalogue, (Guatemala, 1998); Rossina Cazali, "First Painting Biennial of the Central American Isthmus," *Art Nexus* no31 (F/Ap 1999) 74-6; Rossina Cazali, "II Central American Isthmus Painting Biennial: Reflections," *Art Nexus* no39 (F/Ap 2001) 76-78; Maria Dolores G. Torres, "III Central American Isthmus Visual Arts Biennial," *Art Nexus* 1 no47 (Ja/Mr 2003) 84-88; Monica Kupfer, "4th Visual Arts Biennial of the Central American Isthmus: Museo de Arte," *Art Nexus* 3:56 (Ap/Je 2005) 98-102; Monica Kupfer, "Fifth Visual Arts Biennial of the Central American Isthmus," *Art Nexus* 6:64 (Ap/Je 2007) 66-70. Monica Kupfer in particular raised during the interview with her many of the issues pertaining to the Isthmus Biennial that I present here.

²⁹ *First Painting Biennial of the Central American Isthmus*, 3.

³⁰ For the first Isthmus Biennial all of the corporate sponsors listed, in addition to numerous others, made donations to support the event. See *First Painting Biennial of the Central American Isthmus*, 60.

³¹ For the first Isthmus Biennial in Guatemala it was Fundación Paiz that organized the event. Juanita Bermudez coordinated the third Biennial in Nicaragua. In Honduras it was the Mujeres en las Artes or Association of Women in Arts (MUA) and its executive director America Mejia. The general coordinator was Bayardo Blandino, a Nicaraguan artist and curator who resides in Tegucigalpa and who co-founded the Contemporary Visual Arts Center of Women in the Arts (CAVC/MUA).

³² Jacqueline Riera de Paiz, Directora Ejecutiva Fundación Paiz, "Presentacion," *First Painting Biennial of the Central American Isthmus*, 3.

³³ See Maria Dolores G. Torres, "III Central American Isthmus Visual Arts Biennial in Managua a Renovation," *Art Nexus* 1.47 (Ja/Mr 2003).

³⁴ Monica Kupfer, personal interview, October 23, 2009.

³⁵ The following list of local organizers and corporate sponsorship was provided by Monica Kupfer, personal interview, October 23, 2009.

³⁶ Kupfer, personal interview, October 23, 2009.

³⁷ Dana Leibsohn, Academic Programs, The Association for Latin American Art's Webpage, <http://www.smith.edu/alaa/programs.htm>, updated Winter 2009. The list currently emphasizes programs in the United States. The guide is a bare-bones directory and does not generally include faculty in related fields (history, Spanish, anthropology, literature, Latin

American and/or Iberian Studies, etc.). The ALAA webpage notes Rebecca Rollins Stone's specialization as Ancient Andean and Central American Art. She teaches at in the Art History Department at Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia. Unfortunately the ALAA list is not necessarily the most accurate, case in point, it does not reflect David Craven's specialization in Central American Art History, his numerous publications on Nicaraguan art, nor the recent seminars and lecture series he has organized on Central American Art at the University of New Mexico.

The Austin Symposium: debates on dependency and identity in the mid 1970s.

1970 marks the beginning of a numerous series of symposiums around the topic of the identity of Latin American art. This paper will explore into the most significant of the decade: the Symposium on Latin American Art and Literature, held at the University of Austin, Texas on October 1975.

Three main issues were debated at Austin: a) The possibility for Latin American art to show a distinctive visual configuration; b) The need to abandon traditional methodologies of art analysis, based on the modern canon of the Western world, in order to advance new ones, that could respect the inner historical processes of the Latin American scene; c) the connection between art and context and the extent to which art should/could represent the contemporary social and political turmoil.

Artists Rufino Tamayo, José Luis Cuevas, Manuel Félguerez, Fernando de Szyszlo, Alejandro Otero and Leonel Góngora, and art critics Marta Traba, Juan Acha, Damián Bayón, Frederico Morais, Jorge Alberto Manrique, Jacqueline Barnitz, Aracy Amaral and Dore Ashton participated in the meeting as panel presenters.

Some journals, like *Artes Visuales* and *Plural*, picked up the debates and continued them through the publishing of articles on related subjects.

The symposium unfolded all the numerous critical positions on the state of Latin American art, creating a platform of theoretical problems in the USA from which many subsequent publications, exhibitions and meetings that sought to spread Latin American art around the Western world departed.

**El Simposio de Arte y Literatura en la Universidad de Austin, Texas, en 1975.
Debates de la crítica entorno a la identidad del arte en América latina.**

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Introducción.

La década del setenta aparece a la distancia como un período extremadamente fértil en congresos, simposios, encuentros, cuyo eje temático fue la discusión de la identidad del arte de América latina. ¿Era posible definir sus características desde el punto de vista teórico, más allá de los agrupamientos circunstanciales que las exhibiciones itinerantes habían creado desde inicios del siglo XX para presentarlo en Estados Unidos y Europa?

Como muchos de los teóricos a los que haremos referencia señalaron, hablar del origen del debate sobre la cuestión identitaria en el arte de América latina nos obligaría a remontarnos a los inicios de la plástica moderna en la región. Ya ha sido señalado que la preocupación por la identidad y las artes visuales en Latinoamérica tuvo su pico de intensidad entre los años 1920 a 1945, cuando ideólogos del latinoamericanismo como José Martí, José Vasconcelos, Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre y Juan Carlos Mariátegui establecieron fuertes vínculos entre factores políticos comunes –el colonialismo- y la necesidad de una manifestación cultural propia que hiciera frente al imperialismo.¹ Los discursos interpretativos formaron parte constitutiva de la genealogía del arte moderno latinoamericano.

¹ Rita Eder, “Art and identity in Latin America”, en Rachel Weiss y Alan West (ed.), *Being América. Essays on Art, Literature and Identity from Latin America*, White Pine Press, Nueva York, 1991, pp. 28-38.

En el período que nos ocupa –los setenta- el debate identitario tuvo, como antecedentes inmediatos, circunstancias de distinta índole: las propias búsquedas de los artistas por representar sus raíces indoamericanas –ejemplo prototípico fue Gunther Gerszo-, en algunos casos también una reacción a la expansión de los lenguajes no figurativos y al desdibujarse de los indicadores de pertenencia en el contexto internacional; los esfuerzos de difusión y presentación del arte latinoamericano en los Estados Unidos realizados en la década del cincuenta por el Departamento de Artes Visuales de la OEA, liderado por el cubano José Gomez Sicre, y en la década del sesenta a través de los programas de intercambio cultural enmarcados en la política de la “Alianza para el Progreso” de Kennedy; la consolidación y fuerza adquirida por las colonias de artistas latinoamericanos en Estados Unidos y Europa; el planteo de Marta Traba respecto a la necesidad de un arte comprometido y por lo tanto conectado con la realidad regional -instalado a mediados de los sesenta en Latinoamérica a través de diversas publicaciones- en el contexto de la radicalización ideológica de muchos intelectuales latinoamericanos; las iniciativas emprendidas por organismos internacionales como la UNESCO, interesados en el desarrollo y expansión cultural del Tercer Mundo; y las gestiones de Damián Bayón quien, mediante sus sucesivas pertenencias institucionales, cumplió un rol clave: supo detectar dónde existía interés genuino en el arte latinoamericano -y era por ende factible generar nuevos proyectos-, y logró articular fuertes conexiones entre instituciones, artistas y críticos de Europa, Estados Unidos y Latinoamérica.

Estimulados por la aparición de nuevas poéticas, el interés de organismos internacionales y la multiplicación de exhibiciones de arte latinoamericano en la escena artística internacional, los críticos de arte latinoamericanos se vieron empujados a salir en búsqueda de una identidad cultural definida para América latina.

A partir de 1970, se sucedió una serie de coloquios, exhibiciones y publicaciones que los reunieron en la discusión de la situación del arte en la región: el Encuentro de la UNESCO en Quito (1970), el Simposio sobre Arte y Literatura Latinoamericana en Austin, Texas (1975), el primer Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte en México (1975), las polémicas sobre arte latinoamericano desarrolladas en la revista mexicana *Artes Visuales* (1976), el primer Encuentro de Críticos de Arte y Artistas Plásticos Iberoamericanos en Caracas (1978), un Simposium Latinoamericano en Buenos Aires (1978), el Simposio de la I Bienal Latinoamericana de Arte de San Pablo (1978), el Primer Coloquio Latinoamericano de Fotografía realizado en México (1978), el Primer Coloquio de Arte No-Objetualista organizado por el Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín (1981), el Encuentro Artes Visuales e Identidad en América Latina organizado por el Foro de Arte Contemporáneo de México (1981). Un poco desfasado en el tiempo, el coloquio en ocasión de la I Bienal de la Habana (1984) cerró la cadena de debates sobre la identidad del arte latinoamericano. Si los pensamos en forma conjunta, es posible verificar un *celo latinoamericanista* – como escribiera Roberto Pontual- que fue característico de los años setenta; y también, es factible identificar los principales problemas que conformaron el marco interpretativo de la época.

Tres ejes temáticos pueden distinguirse como las cuestiones centrales debatidas: a) la identidad plástica del arte latinoamericano; b) la puesta en duda de las metodologías tradicionales para su análisis, que lo evaluaban de acuerdo al canon del “arte universal” occidental; c) los nexos entre el arte y la política en América latina.

Artistas, críticos y gestores culturales acordaron que era necesario renovar las perspectivas de análisis del arte de América latina. Se convino que debía generarse una manera distinta de pensar la artisticidad de lo latinoamericano, no dependiente de

un modelo universalista. Este modelo de análisis fue desestimado aún por sus mismos introductores, como fue el caso de Romero Brest. Con distintos matices, un nuevo discurso latinoamericanista – modelo utópico de juicio crítico – fue extendiéndose en América latina, y se constituyó como una alternativa teórica de fuerte competencia con el paradigma modernista. La utopía de la autonomía del arte latinoamericano subyacía a muchas de las posiciones de la crítica de arte de esos años.

Los debates y simposios organizados en la década del setenta dieron lugar a un fenómeno de efervescencia teórica que llegó un tanto tardíamente a la discusión sobre las posibilidades de un arte regional, un arte que en algún modo pudiera reivindicar culturalmente a América latina; algunos artistas no dejaron de señalarlo en el curso de los encuentros. En este sentido, los coloquios coincidieron más con un proceso de expansión del arte latinoamericano en el ámbito internacional. Los setenta –su período de apogeo- fue también el de expansión de las dictaduras en la región, procesos en los que se evidenciaba el fracaso del proyecto de liberación latinoamericana. La necesidad genuina de debatir qué rumbo debía tomar la práctica cultural en Latinoamérica partió también de esta coyuntura.

En principio fue propiamente este fenómeno de expansión del arte regional en el circuito internacional de las instituciones artísticas el que provocó que se pidiera a los críticos latinoamericanos una clave de interpretación para explicarlo en términos de identidad. Los coloquios contribuyeron teóricamente brindando ejes de interpretación ante la popularidad que lograba en el circuito internacional.

Podría decirse que la discusión se dio en tres aspectos: epistemológico, metodológico e ideológico. Estos, en cierta medida, atraviesan el arte de la región en todas sus épocas. Los coloquios concentraron las discusiones en los aspectos epistemológico e ideológico; las polémicas que se sucedieron más tarde a través de las

revistas permitieron a los críticos desarrollar con mayor detenimiento los problemas ligados al aspecto metodológico. De todos modos, todos ellos tuvieron, como trasfondo, la renovación de la pregunta por la identidad artística latinoamericana, y al mismo tiempo, su crisis definitiva.

El arte latinoamericano en busca de una identidad visual. El Simposio de Austin.

El Simposio sobre arte y literatura latinoamericana *Arte Latinoamericano Contemporáneo*, organizado en forma conjunta por la Universidad de Austin (Texas) y la revista mexicana *Plural*, retomó la polémica sobre la identidad del arte latinoamericano que había sido uno de los ejes centrales del Encuentro de Quito, en 1970. El nexo entre la universidad y la publicación fue el arquitecto y crítico de arte argentino Damián Bayón, quien dictaba una cátedra de Historia del Arte en la mencionada universidad desde 1973 y difundía entre sus estudiantes la revista *Plural* –de la que era ocasional colaborador-. Donald Goodall –director de Colecciones Artísticas, y especialista en arte latinoamericano moderno- y Rodolfo Cardona –decano de Estudios Hispánicos- consideraron que tanto los colaboradores de *Plural* como los artistas allí estudiados constituían un núcleo interesante en torno al cual organizar una exposición de arte contemporáneo y un doble simposio literario y plástico.² El evento se desarrolló del 27 a 29 de octubre de 1975 a lo largo de cuatro sesiones. En cada una de ellas, los panelistas presentaban en forma breve su perspectiva respecto de las cuestiones propuestas por los organizadores del simposio. Luego se daba lugar a un debate abierto entre los integrantes del panel, los invitados al evento y los estudiantes asistentes.

² Damián Bayón (relator), *El artista latinoamericano y su identidad*, Monte Ávila, Caracas, 1977, p. 15.

El temario propuesto por los organizadores del simposio giró alrededor de cinco preguntas: 1) ¿Existe el arte latinoamericano contemporáneo como una expresión distinta? Si existe, ¿en qué términos tiene lugar?; 2) ¿Puede el artista latinoamericano producir independientemente de los intereses extranjeros?; 3) ¿Qué modelos operativos tiene el artista latinoamericano a su disposición: corrientes internacionales, movimientos indígenas, o cualquier otro recurso?; 4) ¿Hasta qué punto el artista latinoamericano responde a sus circunstancias inmediatas: comunidad, recursos plásticos o cualquier otra circunstancia?; 5) ¿Es cierta la queja de que la falta de crítica artística en América Latina obliga al artista a buscar respuesta en otros medios?

Las sucesivas preguntas eran en verdad desgloses del problema principal que enunciaba la primera: la posibilidad de que existiera un arte latinoamericano identificable desde sus características visuales. Y este interrogante trasladó por momentos la reflexión al campo filosófico.

En el contexto de la gran diversidad cultural que podía verificarse entre las distintas naciones, varios de los participantes al simposio, como el artista Manuel Felguérez y Damián Bayón, propusieron que Latinoamérica era algo que se perseguía más en sentido proyectivo, que se estaba buscando, que una realidad actual. El crítico brasileño Alfredo de Sant'Anna introdujo al debate la idea de Derridá sobre la pregunta por el origen como algo imposible de resolver, y propuso considerar Latinoamérica como un juego de relatividades.

Los artistas Leonel Góngora y Fernando de Szyszlo coincidían en señalar que la identidad era algo que se busca y se construye paulatinamente: tenía que ver, fundamentalmente, con la elección de cada artista, y en ese sentido, era una construcción.

Una de las intervenciones más importantes fue la de Rufino Tamayo al final de la primera sesión. A juicio de Tamayo, el arte era planetario. Contestaba así la pregunta clave dando por sentado que, en el aspecto visual, no había formas de distinción. Como ejemplo, Tamayo indicaba las influencias del arte latinoamericano precolombino (azteca) sobre Picasso. El artista también intentó dar cuenta de ese ser latinoamericano, pero lo hizo previniendo acerca de la posibilidad de crear un “fenómeno de dos cabezas”, que simplemente no iba a poder conciliar las numerosas particularidades que caracterizaban a las culturas de los países latinoamericanos.

La dificultad por definir sus características llevó a Jorge Alberto Manrique a recuperar el texto de Edmundo O’Gorman sobre la invención de América³ y plantear la posibilidad de que Latinoamérica fuera una invención discursiva. Si Rodríguez Monegal sostenía que se trataba de un debate impuesto desde afuera, Manrique en cambio consideraba que tenía también origen en la región. A su juicio, lo que caracterizaba la cultura regional era “la necesidad de dar cuenta de sí mismo, de explicarse a sí mismo y de explicarse hacia los demás, explicarse hacia los otros”. Esto respondía a la situación ambigua en la que Latinoamérica se encontraba: pertenecía y no pertenecía a la vez a Occidente. Se encontraba dentro de una situación marginal excéntrica que era consustancial a su ser, y que generaba actitudes culturales contradictorias y a la vez complementarias –considerarse occidental o considerarse autóctono- que actuaban en el campo de la plástica. El ejemplo que utilizaba era el del movimiento geométrico mexicano, que tenía un sentido diferente en su país, se explicaba sólo en su propio contexto –refiriendo implícitamente a que constituía una reacción contra el arte políticamente comprometido del Muralismo-.

³ Edmundo O’Gorman, *La invención de América. El universalismo de la cultura de Occidente*, FCE, México DF, 1958.

También Juan Acha fue convocado a sumarse a la discusión sobre la existencia y las particularidades del arte latinoamericano. El crítico peruano discutió abiertamente en este sentido “la falacia sustancialista” del ser nacional como determinante de identidades culturales nacionales y regionales. En el simposio, hizo notar la falta de un “pensamiento visual independiente, realista y desarrollado, que alimente las obras e ideales artísticos con sus reflexiones”; pero terminó afirmando que “este pensamiento todavía tiene por delante conciliar sus intereses eminentemente visuales con las preocupaciones políticas y los modelos literarios, así como iniciar el trazo de una teleología latinoamericana y comenzar una reformulación latinoamericana de los conceptos básicos del arte”.⁴

Los debates parecieron no responder en forma definitiva la pregunta eje del simposio, porque ésta reapareció claramente delineada en la última sesión en la pregunta de un estudiante: “¿qué es lo característicamente latinoamericano en el arte contemporáneo creado por artistas de Latinoamérica?, ¿es una cuestión de contenido, estilo o técnica? ¿Qué es lo que tienen en común, por ejemplo, las obras que aparecen en la exposición *Plural?*” Jorge Alberto Manrique fustigó a los estudiantes por persistir en la cuestión luego de todas las discusiones sostenidas en esos días. El crítico mexicano admitió que lo propio del arte latinoamericano no estaba en sus formas específicas, sino en el sentido que esas formas tenían, “dada su circunstancia” –es decir, en relación con su propio contexto-. Lo que a su juicio tenían en común las obras de la exhibición era que se trataba de respuestas de artistas como grupo perteneciente a un mundo marginado de los grandes centros.

⁴ Juan Acha, “¿Existe el Arte Latinoamericano como una expresión distinta? Si existe, ¿en qué términos?”, ponencia presentada en el Simposio de Austin, Universidad de Texas (USA), 1975. En Juan Acha, *Ensayos y ponencias latinoamericanistas*, Galería de Arte Nacional, Caracas, 1984, p. 157.

Esta contestación transparentaba la confusión de dos problemas distintos que se habían solapado imperceptiblemente el uno al otro en el debate: por un lado, si era importante el contexto para interpretar la obra de un artista; por el otro, si era posible identificar las obras latinoamericanas como trabajos visualmente distintivos. Los esfuerzos más tenaces –como el del crítico literario chileno Jaime Concha- llegaban a la sola evidencia de que el arte latinoamericano expresaba de algún modo –aunque no se pudiera definir con precisión cuál- la cultura latinoamericana. Las dificultades para hallar una definición específica del arte producido en Latinoamérica se salvaban apelando a la especificidad cultural de la región.

La oscilación entre un enfoque esencialista y otro relativista daba cuenta de un momento de transición entre discursos críticos enmarcados dentro de un pensamiento todavía moderno y las nuevas perspectivas que anunciaban el quiebre posmoderno.

Cuestión de métodos. La continuación del debate en *Artes Visuales y Plural*.

El Simposio de Austin tuvo tal resonancia en la escena artística mexicana, que Carla Stellweg, directora de la revista *Artes Visuales*, decidió continuar el debate en el número 10 de abril de 1976. Propuso entonces a los participantes de dicho encuentro y a otros teóricos, seguir analizando sus puntos de vista por correspondencia. Solicitó a algunos que enviaran a la redacción un texto en el que se abordara la cuestión de la estética latinoamericanista, y luego reenvió esos artículos a otros críticos para que polemizaran con éstos y dieran su respectiva opinión. Llegó incluso a solicitar un comentario a otro comentario, triplicando la polémica –como en el caso del análisis de Rita Eder al comentario de Jorge Romero Brest-.

Las discusiones se desarrollaron fundamentalmente en el aspecto metodológico: la pregunta implícita, que unía invisiblemente todos los aportes, era de qué manera debía tratar el crítico latinoamericano el arte de la región. La revista reiteró, a modo de referencia, las preguntas del citado Simposio, pero cada crítico vio la ocasión como posibilidad de afinar los instrumentos de análisis y emitir su posición al respecto.

Unas de los temas que habían sido discutidos en el Simposio fue el contexto en el que se nutría el artista latinoamericano y el debate sobre la autenticidad del arte de aquellos que vivían hace décadas en Europa y los Estados Unidos. ¿Era verdaderamente latinoamericana esa producción?

En el Simposio de Austin, Marta Traba había sostenido que lo importante era plantear qué tipo de servicio prestaba el artista en la sociedad latinoamericana contemporánea. Para Traba, el artista debía responder a los intereses de su comunidad, prestar un servicio social, y no convertirse en *juglar* que divierte y entretiene.

Todos los artistas participantes del encuentro consideraron en cambio este debate una discusión periclitada -aún aquellos comprometidos políticamente con la izquierda como Fernando de Szyszlo-. El artista debía tener la libertad para elegir su camino: quedarse en su tierra natal, viajar periódicamente al exterior, o vivir en otro país. Todo era aceptable, y existían cientos de casos que probaban que los resultados podían ser siempre fructíferos.⁵

⁵ Ya en el encuentro latinoamericano de artistas en Santiago de Chile -organizado en ocasión de la creación del Museo de la Solidaridad-, una de las conclusiones refería justamente a este punto: el arte revolucionario no debía corresponder a ningún estilo en particular, ni responder a ningún programa. Miguel Rojas Mix, "La transformación de las artes plásticas en Chile gracias a la Revolución", *Diorama de la Cultura*, México DF, 15 de setiembre de 1973, pp. 12-13.

En la continuación editorial del debate organizada por *Artes Visuales*, Manuel Felguérez escribió posicionándose a favor de la pluralidad del arte latinoamericano. La expresión de éste no podía ser más que altamente diferenciada, pues se trataba de pueblos con una gran herencia cultural.⁶

Para Romero Brest el problema de la dependencia era importante, en cuanto le imponía al artista una restricción evidente a su libertad interior. En este sentido, su decisión no era sólo personal, sino que dependía también del contexto sociopolítico del que el artista formaba parte. Por ello, era necesario distinguir lo estético de lo artístico –y hacía alusión así a su reciente ensayo *Política artísticovisual en Latinoamérica-*: preguntar por la estética latinoamericana era hacerlo por el conjunto de actitudes culturales de la sociedad, y no solo por las formas que concientemente creaban los artistas. Lo estético era la raíz de lo artístico, y su caracterización debía partir del análisis de los factores estéticos “concurrentes para su existencia”.⁷ A juicio de Romero Brest, si se quería “obtener un arte latinoamericano” –se entiende que se refería a un arte latinoamericano auténtico-, era necesario trabajar en la creación de una base estética unitaria, similar a esa unidad sociocultural que generaba manifestaciones populares auténticas y por ello valiosas. Los términos del debate ideológico vigente exigían replanteos completos de posiciones, como aquél del que daba cuenta Romero Brest, quien ahora se manifestaba a favor de posiciones políticas como la de José Luis Cuevas y Marta Traba, insistiendo en la relevancia de tomar en consideración las dependencias culturales para el análisis del arte latinoamericano.

Marta Traba, Jorge Romero Brest y Mario Pedrosa coincidían en señalar la decadencia en la que había derivado el arte occidental. De lo que se dudaba era, claro,

⁶ Manuel Felguérez, “La necesaria pluralidad del arte latinoamericano”, *Artes Visuales*, México DF, No. 10 (abril-junio 1976), pp. 6-7.

⁷ Jorge Romero Brest, “Comentario al texto de Damián Bayón”, *Artes Visuales*, México DF, No. 10 (abril-junio 1976), p. 24.

de la autenticidad del arte culto latinoamericano, del arte de las vanguardias producido para las élites. En el artículo enviado a *Artes Visuales*, Pedrosa analizó los trabajos artísticos como respuestas a la necesidad apremiante de las metrópolis posindustriales por renovar sus productos. El ejemplo de su estado agonizante eran los últimos actos de autodestrucción del *body art*, “testimonio de una situación cultural final, sin salida existencial ni trascendental”.⁸ La tarea creativa de la humanidad recaía ahora en el Tercer Mundo: sólo en éste era posible la germinación de un nuevo arte.

Tocó a Jorge Alberto Manrique comentar el texto enviado por Mario Pedrosa a *Artes Visuales*. Manrique consideraba inaceptable la concepción de la cultura latinoamericana como ilegítima por ser colonial. Los latinoamericanos habían sido siempre poseedores de una cultura propia, que -aun como cultura colonial- había sido capaz de producir valores. “Nuestra participación – sostenía – en la cultura occidental es real, y resulta ingenuo proponer negarla hacia el futuro; no es un pecado: es un hecho”.⁹ Justamente el arte latinoamericano había dado cuenta de esa situación colonial, se había constituido en una respuesta plástica a dicha condición. Los valores producidos por los artistas de la región se expresaban en formas que a veces mostraban una separación respecto de los valores generales de la cultura europea, y a veces resultaban formalmente similares. Esto se vinculaba con sus ideas respecto del *movimiento pendular* del arte latinoamericano, presentadas en principio en relación con una interpretación general del arte mexicano,¹⁰ principio heurístico que en Austin

⁸ Mario Pedrosa, “Arte hoy, ¿hacia donde? Manifiesto para los Tupiniquis o Nambás”, *Artes Visuales*, México DF, No. 10 (abril-junio 1976), p. 34.

⁹ Jorge Alberto Manrique, “Comentario al texto de Mario Pedrosa”, *Artes Visuales*, México DF, No. 10 (abril-junio 1976), p. 37.

¹⁰ Jorge Alberto Manrique, “El rey ha muerto: viva el rey. La renovación de la pintura mexicana”, *Universidad de México*, vol. XXIV, No. 7-8, México, marzo-abril de 1970. En Jorge Alberto Manrique, *Una visión del arte y de la historia, Tomo IV* (La construcción de procesos artísticos), Serie

extendió a todo el arte latinoamericano. En cada caso nacional le era posible registrar esta misma oscilación alternativa entre lo propio y lo ajeno, que surgía de la pertenencia excéntrica a Occidente.

La intervención de la crítica mexicana Alaíde Foppa en un segundo número especial de *Artes Visuales* era la única que abordaba la cuestión de la identidad visual del arte latinoamericano de la manera más directa y actual. Para Foppa, los elementos de diferenciación se derivaban principalmente de la iconografía, y por ello la poética de algunos artistas como Carlos Mérida, Rufino Tamayo o Ricardo Martínez presentaba características más identificables con la pertenencia nacional. No tenía inconveniente en reconocer abiertamente que ningún artista en la actualidad podía permanecer ajeno a las grandes corrientes del arte contemporáneo, y que no existía un “arte latinoamericano” en sí mismo, así como tampoco existía un arte europeo. A tal punto no había una identidad continental que se manifestara como algo diferenciado del arte universal, que también resultaba difícil hablar de “arte occidental”: fundamentalmente debido a la occidentalización del Japón y China, esta última con expresiones cercanas al realismo socialista. El *cómo* no era peculiar a ninguna región.¹¹

En *Plural* Acha intentó conectar la significación estética con la social, y la creación artística con la transformación social, en lo que él llamaba *ecoestética*: la interacción de la ecología con la sensibilidad colectiva y el arte. La forma en que ejemplificaba este “nuevo” instrumento era sin embargo bastante problemática. “Lo latinoamericano en la creación artística verdadera habrá que buscarlo en los patrones sensitivos e inconscientes (sentido de forma colectivo) que hace visible el artista para

Estudios y fuentes del arte en México LXVIII, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, 2001, pp. 37-53.

¹¹ Alaíde Foppa, ¿Existe un arte latinoamericano?, *Artes Visuales*, México DF, No. 14 (abril-junio 1977), pp. 9-11.

exaltarlos, corregirlos o encauzarlos”.¹² Carlos Cruz Diez, Marcelo Bonevardi y Luis Tomasello tenían en común el poner la atención al juego cambiante e inestable de luces y sombras. Y esa inestabilidad de espacio y tiempo era susceptible de ser emparentada, a juicio de Acha, con la psicología mestiza y plural de los latinoamericanos.¹³ Su propuesta, más que novedosa, traía recuerdos de la vieja metodología de Tayne.

Arte y autonomía creativa, ideológica y metodológica: la intervención de los artistas.

Las principales preocupaciones manifestadas por los artistas en el Simposio de Austin giraron fundamentalmente entorno a la necesidad de libertad. Allí, todos se pronunciaron a favor de la libertad de elegir los “modelos operativos” que cada uno considerara adecuado para la comunicación. Aún artistas abiertamente afiliados a la izquierda como Fernando de Szyszlo, señalaron que la creación tenía que ver con un acto de elección: en ese proceso, la obra adquiriría su identidad plástica. Por ello el artista debía gozar de libertad plena, sin recibir presiones respecto al *deber ser*, o al *deber representar*, ciertas tradiciones: toda elección era válida. A juicio de Szyszlo, el debate respecto de la identidad que debía mantener el artista latinoamericano —a resguardo de los intereses extranjeros— había perdido vigencia. Era una cuestión que los artistas habían debatido diez años atrás, cuando Marta Traba había presentado sus ideas sobre el peligro de la homogeneización con el arte norteamericano en foros públicos.¹⁴ Los críticos se estaban planteando problemas que los artistas ya habían

¹² Juan Acha, “Comentario sobre la exposición ‘Plural’ en Austin”, *Plural*, México DF, No. 52, enero de 1976, p. 81.

¹³ Art. Cit., p. 80.

¹⁴ Nos referimos al debate que Traba mantuvo con artistas y críticos venezolanos a mediados de 1965, debate que fue recogido en la *Revista Nacional de Cultura* No. 17, Caracas, septiembre-octubre de 1965, pp. 34-44. Cfr. Florencia Bazzano-Nelson, “Cambios de margen: las teorías estéticas de Marta Traba”, prólogo a Marta Traba, *Dos décadas vulnerables en las artes plásticas latinoamericanas*,

discutido antes: quedaba así en flagrante evidencia lo tardío de su reacción. Szyszlo hacía notar que la situación caótica que presentaba el arte internacional, el replanteo de la crítica y el surgimiento de un mercado local le posibilitaba al artista latinoamericano permanecer en su país. Ambas opciones eran aceptables, y existían numerosos ejemplos de ellas.

Alejandro Otero intervino en el mismo sentido señalando que la posición del creador –al menos la suya- era la de estar en constante disponibilidad, de no formarse modelos: “la descarnada experiencia de un hombre estricta e indisolublemente ligado a la circunstancia del medio de donde provino en el momento en que se dio”.¹⁵ Y José Luis Cuevas aprovechó la ocasión para condenar la conducta de aquellos artistas latinoamericanos que ejercían la pintura de una forma totalmente servil a los intereses de los galeristas en Nueva York –aludiendo implícitamente a Tamayo-. Cuevas se ponía a sí mismo como ejemplo de independencia en el medio neoyorkino: había llegado en plena etapa de expansión del expresionismo abstracto –a cuyos exponentes admiraba-, pero no por ello había modificado su poética.

Vinculado al problema de la independencia creativa, en Austin se discutió cómo estaba y debía estar constituida la base económica para la producción de arte latinoamericano. La coleccionista Bárbara Duncan realizó una breve intervención señalando la conveniencia de una colaboración más estrecha entre el capital económico y las instituciones culturales, es decir, la posibilidad de una subvención privada. Su observación recibió críticas por parte de numerosos participantes –fundamentalmente artistas- para quienes esto significaba una clarísima injerencia de los intereses particulares en el arte, que en principio no debía fomentarse. También la

1950-1970, México, Siglo XXI, Colección Arte y Pensamiento, 2005 (reedición del original de 1973), p. 20.

¹⁵ Damián Bayón, *El artista latinoamericano y su identidad...*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 69-70.

breve pronunciación de Terence Grieder, que remarcó la importancia del mercado a la hora de discutir toda producción artística, fue rápidamente descartada.

Se trataba, para los artistas, de una confrontación que se jugaba en términos más amplios, cultural e ideológicamente: para ellos lo que estaba en peligro era la autonomía cultural de América latina. De todos modos, el enfoque que la mayoría reconoció la imposibilidad de una vuelta atrás, y se pronunció en salvaguarda de la práctica artística. En este sentido, fueron propuestas más prácticas y realistas que las de gran parte de los críticos de arte.

Conclusiones.

Los debates de la crítica respondieron también a la solicitación de la escena artística internacional, que entre bienales, exposiciones y mercado, generaba preguntas que requerían respuestas de parte del equipo de teóricos de la región. Resultó difícil sustraerse a las dicotomías teóricas características de un período de transición, como creemos fue la década del setenta. Los vaivenes entre las búsquedas esencialistas y las aperturas relativistas dan cuenta de ello.

Las ideas discutidas en el Simposio de Austin formaron la plataforma de un modelo latinoamericanista de juicio crítico que se ramificó en sucesivos encuentros, publicaciones y exhibiciones. Si bien las posiciones eran heterogéneas, todas apuntaban a dotar de autonomía disciplinar -y por extensión simbólica- a la escritura histórico artística de América latina. Los debates de la crítica sirvieron para poner sobre la mesa de discusión cuestiones de identidad y diferencia que aún hoy son importantes a la hora de hablar del arte latinoamericano; en este sentido, sin duda fueron episodios fundantes de un nuevo modo, metodológica e ideológicamente autónomo, de pensar el arte en la región. A partir de ese momento, se llegó a un

consenso tácito y generalizado en cuanto a que el arte latinoamericano debía ser analizado dentro de su propio contexto histórico, tomando en consideración la diversidad cultural. Actualmente, la perspectiva universalista ha sido prácticamente desestimada por la crítica.

En cuanto a los vínculos entre el compromiso político y el arte, se consolidó una perspectiva autónoma que ya no ató más, de forma determinista, el estilo a la ideología. Aún los artistas militantes por la causa latinoamericana se decidieron por manifestarse a favor de la libertad de acción, después de los acontecimientos sufridos por algunos intelectuales en Cuba. Se esbozaron algunos problemas relativos a la injerencia de los intereses económicos en la financiación del arte, pero las posiciones fueron mayoritariamente críticas; hasta fines de la década, se mantuvo la utopía de un subsidio principalmente estatal del arte.

Si bien pareció que los debates teóricos no pudieron encontrar una imagen artística que respondiera a esa identidad visual latinoamericana tan buscada y tan discutida en los coloquios, la respuesta –temporaria, pero válida para ese momento– ya había sido dada en parte por las instituciones, y estaba implícita en los debates. Hubo una imagen que se repitió en exhibiciones y en numerosos textos resultantes de los coloquios mencionados: la de la obra de Marcelo Bonevardi. Tanto las actas del Simposio de Austin transformadas en libro, como la tapa del ensayo de la UNESCO, llevaban, como única ilustración visual, su obra. Esta imagen se reiteraba por todo lugar que quisiera dar cuenta de la modernidad latinoamericana. Bonevardi estuvo presente en gran parte de las exhibiciones de arte latinoamericano realizadas en la década –entre ellas, la de Austin–.

Una abstracción lírica ubicada en el límite exacto con la figuración, que podía interpretarse, al mismo tiempo y con la misma intensidad, como figurativa y como no-

figurativa, y de cuya configuración visual y concreción plástica podían deducirse sutiles referencias al pasado prehispánico, pareció una imagen adecuada para representar la identidad plástico-visual de los latinoamericanos.

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This striking image is a documentary photograph from Javier Téllez' 2005 performance in Tijuana, *One Flew Over the Void*. The upper half of the frame is occupied by a single figure - a human form suspended in mid-air against a cloudless blue sky. The lower half reveals the context: the body appears to be flying over a ramshackle wooden fence that divides a beach, while a sizeable crowd watches from below. To the left, a star-spangled cannon points upward, revealing the source of the stuntman's flight. Tents and a makeshift stage line up against the fence, along with a patchwork quilt depicting U.S. and Mexican flags. This performance, a human cannonball flight from Tijuana to San Diego, represents a culmination of twenty-first century site-based "border art." As part of the binational art festival InSite, Téllez' piece marks both a return to the primacy of site and an opening up of the U.S.-Mexico border to global influence.

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The first version of InSite in 1992 began not as an approach to the border, but as a means to address the perceived lack of cultural institutions in San Diego.¹ This fact itself is significant, because at the time San Diego boasted many artist-organized groups and collectives including the binational Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronteriza (BAW/TAF), whose work was being recognized on a national and international level.² San Diego's local art scene was centered primarily on its Museum of Contemporary Art, which lacked the resources to "galvanize the energy of then-current artistic practice."³ InSite's original goal, then, was to serve the city of San Diego – the "site" implied in the title. Although a small event with an estimated budget of \$3,500, InSite 92 (officially titled IN/SITE '92) was well received by the local media and even, according to executive director Michael Krichman, "generated a disproportionate amount of ink" compared to the number of projects funded. Only with the 1994 version did the festival open up to cross-border projects and create partnerships with cultural institutions in Tijuana.

By the beginning of the 1990s, specifically the 1992 Columbus Quincentennial and 1994's enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), there began a shift away from physicality and towards portability – the establishment of the mental or internal border, one that may invoke the line on the ground, but no longer relies upon the politico-economic structures of the physical boundary for meaning. At the same time that artists began bringing ideas of the portable border to other parts of the globe, InSite began to bring international, "non-border" artists to San Diego-Tijuana and the

¹ InSite_05 (San Diego: Installation Gallery, 2006), 418.

² In 1990, the BAW/TAF was invited to exhibit at the Venice Biennale. Their show, "Aperto", focused on the U.S.-Mexico border, including issues of colonialism and international boundaries.

³ Ibid. Quoting Michael Krichman.

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U.S.-Mexico border region. I would argue that InSite's strategy of focusing the world's attention on a specific site is not fundamentally opposed to the portable or mental border; rather, the organization has worked to open the region and its art production to outsiders, reinforcing the notion that anyone can be a border thinker, border dweller, or border subject.

The festival's focus on publicity-grabbing performances and stunts as well as the importation of well-known artists from beyond the border region have managed to bring attention to the area, solidifying the category of "border art" for both the mainstream media and the general public. InSite has become the most visible proponent of site-based border art in the twenty-first century, but it is not beyond the reach of criticism. Some have argued that the organization's projects only skim the surface of the issues concerning the region, and that the artists simply move on after the completion of their projects, unconcerned with creating a lasting impact.⁴ The debate surrounding InSite brings up several significant questions – what is the value (and ultimately, the effect) of widespread public attention on the U.S.-Mexico border? Is the focus on the physical site merely a reaction against global trends or a product of these same flows? What, if any, new knowledge is gained from such focused attention on the physical border?

During its seventeen-year history, InSite championed a specific kind of site-based border art production. The most visible of these projects often combine an internationally recognized artist with a staged event on the border. These performances consciously call up the discourse of the spectacle, theorized in the work of Situationist leader Guy

⁴ Artists such as Guillermo Gómez-Peña of La Pocha Nostra and Tijuana-based Luis Ituarte of Consejo Fronteriza por Arte y Cultura (COFAC) have leveled criticism at InSite, questioning the organization's effectiveness in relation to its stated goals of bringing the United States and Mexico closer together through art (see personal interviews with Gómez-Peña from March 23, 2009 and Ituarte from February 9, 2009).

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Debord⁵ for whom art in the 1960s had devolved into “capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image.”⁶ Art of the U.S.-Mexico border navigates the spectacle as well as the socio-political dynamics at work in the region. I contend that InSite’s projects on the border engage in a reversal of Debord’s spectacle, as artists use the public art “event” to bring attention to a region shrouded in secrecy and return political action back to art. In these pieces, the spectacle is called upon by the artist as a strategy, rather than as a trope to be undermined. In a society of fast-moving and ubiquitous images, it is the function of this artist-controlled spectacle to arrest the viewer, revealing to the socio-political issues behind the work rather than serving as a distraction from the real. In practice, this reversal is often ineffective, for the mainstream spectacle (which can be seen as part of the culture industry⁷) tends to absorb and co-opt any attempts to undo it. InSite’s projects aim to open up the region, bringing these otherwise peripheral experiences to the mainstream.

Despite these goals, InSite has come under intense criticism for its methods and its focus on the physicality of site. I would argue that InSite sought to define mainstream border art production of the twenty-first century, inserting itself into a contentious dialogue with Latino and Chicano art activists. In doing so, the organization has helped to generate a resurgence of art that focuses primarily on site, rather than more generalized

⁵ Debord’s work on the spectacle is summed up in his book *Society of the Spectacle* (originally published 1967, film version 1973). For a thorough treatment of the Situationist International in its historical context, see Simon Ford, *The Situationist International: A User’s Guide* (Black Dog Publishing: London, 2005).

⁶ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Paris, 1967) Thesis 34.

⁷ For Theodore Adorno’s and Max Horkheimer’s work on the culture industry see “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944).

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notions of globalization, migratory flows or cultural contact.⁸ InSite's first iteration, in 1992, sponsored art projects that were wedded to their site, alluding to, if not necessarily at the border. Subsequent festivals in 1994, 1997 and 2000, moved steadily toward a notion of site-based border art. With the 1997 version in particular, InSite gained national prominence with an installation by Marcos Ramírez ERRE, who constructed a giant two-headed Trojan horse ("Toy-an Horse") to straddle the international border crossing at San Ysidro.⁹ Constructed entirely of wood and positioned so that each head looked towards a different country, the horse was seen by the more than 136,000 people each day who pass through the crossing either on foot or by car. The iconography of the wooden horse was instantly recognizable. The artwork had appeared overnight at the border crossing, seemingly a "gift" from each nation to the other and recreating the scene from Greek mythology. Was the two-headed horse, looking at both sides of the border, a kind of stealth attack on the border region and all its presuppositions? If so, what, or who, was doing the attacking?

I would argue that the Toy-an Horse installation marked a turning point for InSite. The piece became an unintentional "star" of InSite '97. After a 2000 Whitney Biennial border art piece entitled "Stripes and Fence Forever – Homage to Jasper Johns" Ramírez

⁸ Although I will discuss InSite projects here, grassroots movements have also used these tactics to bring about social awareness. For example, Chicano activist/artist Mario Torero's collective "Bl/ev" is currently attempting to bring attention to the gentrification of San Diego's primarily Mexican-American Barrio Logan neighborhood. In March of 2009, Bl/ev sponsored a Cesar Chavez parade through the community, obtaining grants to paint each of the residences and businesses along Logan Avenue. The ultimate goal was a street full of murals, revitalizing a tradition that had begun with Chicano Park. Whether or not Torero's project ultimately succeeds, its main strategies – the spectacle of the parade and the symbolism inherent in mural painting – are endemic to the border.

⁹ *InSITE97* (San Diego: Installation Gallery, 1997).

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ERRE eventually shifted his focus from the border to broader topics,¹⁰ but the horse remained in collective memory as an instant signifier for U.S.-Mexico relations. The media success of this project led to the development of further InSite border installations intended to provoke discussion and debate. By 2000, the organization's focus rested squarely on the border and its ability to generate public attention in a formerly peripheral region – making the periphery mainstream.

InSite's attempts to redefine the San Diego/Tijuana region have affected the majority of mainstream border art production. While the general trend in the art world is away from site-specificity and toward a more global concept of "cultural contact", InSite has led a resurgence of art that relies heavily on its location. By the early 1990s, artists such as the Mexican-born Guillermo Gómez-Peña had begun making art that embraced a more portable notion of "border." Borders became conflated with such concepts as globalization trends, international migration, neo- and post-colonialism. Shortly afterwards, InSite took a reductive, almost reactionary view of site intended to bring the focus back to the physical boundary. For these projects, the site is integral to, and in some cases overshadows the artwork itself. In Tellez' case, a human cannonball flying over the border is Art, while the same spectacle at a county fair is simply mass entertainment.

The organization has also come under intense scrutiny from local artists, Chicano activists and the media. Luis Ituarte, Tijuana native and founder of the Consejo Fronteriza de Arte y Cultura (COFAC) criticized InSite for focusing too literally on the border politics, "most of the proposals that these people have done don't have an

¹⁰ Ramírez ERRE began to explore more universal themes of love and conflict resolution with his 2003 pieces "The Multiplication of the Bread" and "Garden of Angels". In 2007 he collaborated with other artists for a project exploring the impact of human beings on the planet – "Human/Nature."

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opening. They are kind of like criticizing what is happening, or looking at it from the human side of how people are suffering...I like to see the other part.”¹¹ This “opening” to which he refers is a critical part of much activist art – creating a space for change. By emphasizing the socio-political situation at the border, InSite projects are poised to generate awareness, but few encourage the viewer to act. InSite has also been called “elitist,” making no effort to “integrate the local artists, especially not Latinos or Chicanos.” In response, InSite_05 purported to have a greater focus on community interaction and involvement, emphasizing grassroots projects over performance “events.” Even the most visible exception to this, Téllez’ *One Flew Over the Void*, contained an element of community interaction, for the artist continued his work with mental institutions and incorporated some of the patients into the final performance.

Perhaps the most vocal criticism of InSite’s border projects stems from their choice of who to include in the festivals. Early iterations of InSite invited local, San Diego artists and many from Mexico. By InSite 97, however, a large number of international artists were included, invited from abroad and brought to the border for a two-week consultation period.¹² This trend continued through the two subsequent festivals in 2000-01 and 2005. Many critics of InSite have claimed that the organization privileges the artworld perspective over local interests, even as it brings greater attention to the region. Is it even possible to mediate between the “insider” status of border-dwellers and the “outsider” status of the artists and organizers?

Artists who have made an entire career of border art have been conflicted as to this relationship. Guillermo Gómez-Peña has claimed that “...these are extremely

¹¹ Luis Ituarte, Personal Interview, February 2, 2009. Tijuana, B.C. Mexico.

¹² Information gathered from the InSite archive, San Diego, CA. Accessed February 10, 2009.

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interesting projects. To me the problem is what the art world does with them. If they are meant to simply contribute to the long list of extreme art experiences codified by the international art world, or are they actually contributing to a more complex and better understanding in the relationship between the two countries?"¹³ Gómez-Peña's point here is a relevant one, for it emphasizes two countries, the United States and Mexico. But what of the rest of the world – is it possible for a U.S.-Mexico border artwork to contribute to the relationship between *other* countries? In the case of Javier Téllez' project, his home country of Venezuela, his European and American audiences, even the institutional milieu to which he has devoted so much of his career, all of these places are at least peripherally invoked in the work. Although Téllez' *One Flew Over the Void* straddles the United States and Mexico, it is the artist's international standing that opens up a multi-faceted dialogue on the subject. In discussing border art, it is of utmost importance not to privilege a certain point of view over the other, the "insider" over the "outsider" or vice versa. Gómez-Peña himself, as he readily admits, is an outsider by birth, although he has attained "insider" status through his decades-long association with the border.

The question here is not whether outside art can contribute to the relationship among different countries, but how the work constructs a productive and long-term dialogue between the individuals or groups affected. Many InSite projects create a novel way of addressing the border that lasts as long as the festival or the piece itself. In 1997, the Belgian-born Francis Alÿs crossed the border from Tijuana to San Diego by way of Australia, Southeast Asia, Japan, and North America, sending postcards to InSite from each destination. Entitled *The Loop*, the project was roundly criticized as a border art

¹³ Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Personal Interview, March 23, 2009.

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gimmick – crossing the border without enacting a “border crossing” – but to what end?¹⁴

Alÿs certainly situated the U.S.-Mexico border within a larger network of international borders and border crossings, and the piece had potential to raise questions as to the nature of this relationship. Whether on the part of the artist or the organization, this line of thought was never fully pursued. Works such as Alÿs’ piece have tended to disappear once the festival ends; they leave no lingering images, and generate no lasting conversation.

Invoking the “airspace” over the border, InSite 2005’s flagship event, Venezuelan-born Javier Téllez commissioned stuntman David Smith to be shot from a cannon from Mexico into the United States, titling the result *One Flew Over the Void*.¹⁵ Crossing 150 feet from a Tijuana beach to San Diego’s Border Field State Park, Smith’s journey lasted only a few seconds, but attracted the kind of attention that befitted such an event. The iconic images produced from the performance showed the stuntman in mid-air directly over the surprisingly run-down wooden fence separating the United States from Mexico. A version of this image appears on the cover of the InSite 2005 catalogue, cementing the organization’s relationship to this particular kind of event art. The absurdity of the human form flying over the line complements the absurdity of the fence reaching out into the ocean, as if trying to separate even the Mexican *water* from that of the United States. The human cannonball flight was the culmination of a full-day festival straddling the border, for which even the Guinness Book of World Records was notified. While the performance was neither the longest human cannonball flight nor the highest, it

¹⁴ See the Krichman interview in InSite_05’s catalogue, *Situational Public*.

¹⁵ Smith, described in Téllez’ proposal as the “world’s most illustrious human cannonball” already holds the records for the longest and highest cannonball flights. (From the InSite archives, accessed February 10, 2009).

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did qualify for the book's category of "fastest international border crossing".¹⁶ Beyond the obvious gimmick, which attracted the attention of the media as well as the general public, Téllez' performance served as an embodiment of the spectacle and, I argue, its artist-controlled reversal.

To explain what I mean by reversal of the spectacle, it is important to study its prior theorizations. According to Situationist International leader Guy Debord, the spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.¹⁷ Debord describes a society "devastated by the shift from use-value and material concreteness to exchange value and the world of appearances"¹⁸ In these formulations, the spectacle propels a Marxian "false consciousness;" it is a distraction to the public, meant to placate, convince and cajole. The artwork is lost within this competition of appearances. In a recent theorization by Charles Garoian and Yvonne Gaudelius, visual culture is a kind of "spectacle pedagogy" – images are among the forms that teach us what and how to see and think, mediating the ways in which we interact with each other as social beings.¹⁹ Images, such as the documentation of Jaar's balloons or those of Téllez' human cannonball commission, are the primary means by which artists communicate; the performance itself must be image-ready, capable of producing striking visuals that are easily digested. My claim, however, is that the *meaning* of these spectacles is not so easily digested. In this case, the reversal goes beyond simply generating mass attention to raise social awareness; Téllez instead created a *parody* of the mainstream spectacle.

¹⁶ Javier Téllez. Project Proposal and Documentation for *One Flew Over the Void*. InSite Archives, San Diego, CA. Accessed February 10, 2009.

¹⁷ Debord, Thesis 4.

¹⁸ Simon Ford. *The Situationist International: A User's Guide* (London, 2005). 102.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 2.

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For *One Flew over the Void*, what are the elements of spectacle being parodied or reversed? I would argue that the primary connection with the spectacle is found in the relationship of human cannonball to the international border. First, the human cannonball itself is a product of mass entertainment. Accordingly, Téllez creates a carnival atmosphere for the event, captured in the images of the crowd and the homemade banners below. The crowd itself is a form of spectacle, a mixture of the general public and a group of mental patients wearing masks as part of the performance. Working with the physically and mentally challenged and examining the institutional dynamics at play has been a recurring theme throughout Téllez' career.²⁰ With this combination of elements – stuntman, mental patients, international border crossing – the entire performance reads like a vaudevillian throwback. According to InSite's executive director Michael Krichman, Téllez created “a sort of spectacle so out of the ordinary that officials did not see it as jeopardizing their everyday systems of control.”²¹ Because Téllez' piece works *within* the spectacle framework to reverse it, drawing the performance to the point of absurdity, the authorities it criticizes fail to recognize the potential threat to their system.

The centerpiece of the performance – Smith's flight across the border – can be read in several ways as well. It is no accident that the stuntman is a U.S. citizen. While it is possible that no Mexican-born stuntmen were to be found, the fact remains that Smith's citizenship allowed Téllez and InSite to pass through bureaucratic hurdles far more easily than had he been a foreign national. Even so, Smith's border crossing was cleared ahead of time with the proper authorities. The stuntman's citizenship is significant, because the performance could not have taken place as easily with a Mexican

²⁰ In 2008, his piece for the Whitney Biennial *Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those Who See* incorporated the observations of blind people describing an elephant for the first time.

²¹ InSite_05, 425, quoting a March 2006 interview with Michael Krichman.

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crossing the border. Téllez' gesture here is seemingly lighthearted, poking fun at the Anglo fear of illegal immigration. This mentality assumes that immigrants (particularly Mexican ones) will find any way possible to get into the United States, whether by crossing in the middle of the desert or, in the extreme, being shot through the air over the fence. While acknowledging the inequalities in crossing on both sides of the border, the performance also comes off as less threatening to the Anglo art-going public. The "Mexican invasion" is kept at bay through U.S. border control procedures and the hardships of acquiring legal immigration documents. One finds meaning in the direction of the crossing as well – the human cannonball flies to the United States, rather than into Mexico. With the rise in narcoviolence, tourist kidnappings and infectious disease south of the border, migration *to* Mexico is decidedly unpopular. Entering Mexico requires no passport, no documentation of any kind, just a walk through a turnstile. Returning to the United States is far more of an "event".

In the historic context, it is necessary to examine *why* InSite has returned to the physical border, rather than further exploring the concepts of portability and mentality. On one level, InSite returns to site because of the political reality of the border. In the region, site is highly charged, magnifying every symbolic or artistic gesture. Artists are both challenged and inspired by the border. Bringing attention to the physical site, rather than to more postmodern concepts of global flows and migratory patterns, also allows for the organization to effect practical change. InSite, as well as numerous grassroots organizations focusing on the border, seeks tangible results – a reduction of border crossing deaths, decreased militarization, ultimately the destruction of the wall. Although the site-specific imperative initially seems like a return to earlier ways of addressing the

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border, InSite has actually benefited from the decoupling of the border from the physicality of site. The notion of hosting an international arts festival in Tijuana-San Diego, bringing international artists to the border to solicit their perspective, reverses the flow of the portable border. Rather than new knowledge moving from the border to the rest of the world, InSite brings global expertise to the region – the creation of new knowledge at and for the border. This dynamic is the result of political realism informed by the postmodern dematerialization of the border.

- Ila Sheren, MIT
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STRATEGIES AND REPERCUSSIONS OF THE INSITE CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION EVENT IN THE CURRENT ARTISTIC PRODUCTION AT THE BORDER

Ruth Estévez

The following proposal analyzes the significance and resulting repercussions of the INSITEⁱ event, both in terms of cultural policies and in the conceptualization of artistic practices in the border region (Tijuana-San Diego).

The discussion will center on two simultaneously developed points of analysis.

1. The creation of a different model for cultural production.
2. The assimilation of new artistic practices.

The first questions that must be addressed are: What was the artistic tradition at the border before InSite? What was its relation to the denominated Chicano project? Which institutions presented the projects? What were the connections with the international mainstream? Were these necessary? What were the existing relations between the two countries, and under which parameters did the cultural collaboration and cooperation attempts emerge? Once I outline the artistic landscape at the border, I will place INSITE and its work strategies within the framework of a *modus operandi* that ended not only with the institutions but also with the inherited artistic practices at the border.

Relying on the two aforementioned points, I will lay out the paradox of INSITE's disengagement with the public and local artists as it becomes a model of artistic creation for the new generations, as well as a cultural production model.

ⁱ The INSITE event is a cross-border cooperation project that has taken place at the Tijuana-San Diego border since 1992. It calls for contemporary artists from both countries and from around the world to submit site-specific proposals.

ESTRATEGIAS Y REPERCUSIÓN DEL EVENTO DE COOPERACIÓN BINACIONAL INSITE

Mrta. Ruth Estévez

Escenario I. La huida es más antigua que el ataque

San Diego y Tijuana son dos ciudades que, no obstante sus insalvables diferencias, tienen la excentricidad como elemento común: se hallan alejadas simbólicamente y físicamente de sus “centros”, con una geografía urbana bastante peculiar. Si nos remontamos a los años ochenta, la ciudad de San Diego, en lo referente a su actividad artística, no tenía un nexo de unión directo con ciudades como Nueva York, Los Ángeles o San Francisco, a pesar de contar con una infraestructura cultural notable. Del otro lado, la desvinculación de Tijuana con la capital mexicana actuaba por partida doble: al alejamiento geográfico venía unido a un olvido y abandono político y cultural por parte de las autoridades del país.

Desde principios del siglo pasado, San Diego quería evadirse de la posición a la que había sido relegada como epígrafe perdido entre el Pacífico y la frontera mexicana. La batalla por el control de California estaba perdida, por lo que era necesario construirse un imaginario histórico y urbano a base de inversiones privadas. La exposición *Panamá-California* con motivo de la apertura del Canal en 1914, recogía la “tradición” de los antiguos colonos españoles, aplicando un prototipo hispano que encajaba perfectamente con las necesidades de territorialización. Esta insistencia regionalista concedía a los sandieguinos la oportunidad de fabricarse una Historia¹ a medida; un proceso de reivindicación para escapar del anonimato como puesto fronterizo.

A unos kilómetros de distancia, Tijuana dibujaba el comienzo geográfico de la Patria Mexicana, al mismo tiempo que se perdía como último bastión de la memoria del país. Al igual que San Diego, la ciudad inventaba sus propias expresiones combinando un incierto pasado indígena con un desaforado nacionalismo revolucionario. La necesidad de constituirse como espacio iba unida a un genuino instinto de supervivencia. Por si fuera poco, otra aureola dramática iba a acelerar un abrupto paisaje; A partir de 1965, Tijuana se convertiría en el laboratorio experimental económico de la postindustria, con la implantación de maquiladoras y la contratación masiva de mano de obra barata. Lo que en un principio se perfilaba como una aberración socio urbana pasaría a ser el modelo “ejemplar” mexicano de una economía basada en la incertidumbre.

El *tándem* necesario entre sobresalir-sobrevivir, removía en ambas ciudades la urgencia patológica de un continuo trasplante; y sería en la construcción de significados donde crearían analogías y disparidades en la visualización del espacio fronterizo. Como era de suponer, el conflicto entre los estereotipos creados desde fuera y la necesidad de definirse localmente, proporcionó las herramientas necesarias para el acotamiento del arte fronterizo.

A forma de breve apunte para mapear el escenario anterior al evento de arte contemporáneo INSITE -del que nos ocuparemos en este ensayo-, es en el arte chicano donde encontramos la exégesis inicial de la producción artística fronteriza. Tomás Ibarra Fausto definía el proyecto chicano como los “guardianes” del *ethos* grupal. Un arte público que participaba del esfuerzo colectivo para conformar nuevos referentes de vida,

convirtiendo los espacios en lugares entrañables, delimitando territorios y sobre todo, creando una barda de resistencia cultural. Como huérfanos transculturales se tenía que lograr un espacio real para asentarse, conectando a los artistas chicanos de San Diego, con otros centros culturales de los EE.UU.ⁱⁱ La exposición *Dos Ciudades*, fue una de las primeras muestras donde se cuestionó artísticamente la construcción histórica dentro del arte de frontera. Para algunos de los artistas participantes, la interacción seguía conduciéndose en la forma original de apropiación que había establecido el ejemplo histórico de colonialismo: el territorio que una vez fue México. Una frontera marginada de las capitales culturales de los dos países, daba lugar a un espacio heroico de expresiones culturales propias que actuaban tanto en resistencia como distancia de la cultura dominante. En una muestra posterior, titulada *La Frontera/The Border*, Patricio Chávez seguía definiendo el “Arte de Frontera” de forma dogmática: 1) enraizado en el movimiento chicano, 2) orientado hacia asuntos de la frontera México y EE.UU., 3) colaboración y el compromiso con la comunidad, 4) conceptualmente estaba descentralizado y daba validez a los “marginados y a los otros”, 5) multicultural.ⁱⁱⁱ

Es por eso que para los artistas de la zona, la frontera era un paréntesis radical, un espacio creado para resistir. La situación de vigilancia y censura fruto de su condición geopolítica, provocó que grupos activistas de los ochenta encontraron en la barda una forma eficaz de acometer contra la injusticia de las normas en un estado de excepción. Había que hacerse visible aludiendo a la contradicción entre el discurso de las autoridades sobre acogida y cooperación y la inoperativa realidad. Las intervenciones artísticas se caracterizaban por la saturación, imponiéndose de forma hipervisible. La representación se hacía omnipresente, enmarcando la intervención una imagen fija de la realidad. Es lógico que la necesidad casi desesperada de manifestación, unida a la urgencia de un proceso identitario, propiciara la elaboración de un discurso unidireccional.

En este escenario surgió el proyecto artístico de colaboración binacional INSITE a principios de los años noventa; un proyecto con peculiaridades diversas que, a lo largo de dos décadas, conseguiría modificar parcialmente, no solo las estructuras conceptuales de la producción artística en la frontera, sino el modelo de administración cultural de la misma.

La puesta en escena del primer proyecto piloto de INSITE en 1992, coincidió con un arte fronterizo de universos agotados, por lo que no resulta extraño que esta iniciativa encontrara un campo explorable a la par que una urgencia por el mismo. El evento no se constituiría como tal hasta unos años después, ya que en aquella ocasión fue exclusivamente una propuesta de la *non profit* San Dieguina, *Installation Gallery*^{iv}. Esta basaba parte de su trabajo en residencias eventuales de artistas extranjeros, a través de proyectos efímeros.

No sería hasta la edición de 1994 que el proyecto se establecería como un evento de cooperación binacional entre ambos países dados los óptimos resultados obtenidos en el 92. Más de setenta trabajos sin temática curatorial precisa establecieron una singular cacofonía para representar el arte de frontera: desde el cuestionamiento de su legitimidad pasada a el planteamiento de una desarticulación paulatina. La multiplicidad de opciones y la falta de una temática inicial, servirían para ensayar un programa de aciertos y errores, sin perder de vista las particularidades históricas, políticas y geográficas.

De hecho, del programa de residencias con artistas extranjeros de *Installation Gallery*, surgió una de las estrategias principales para extrapolar otro tipo de prácticas fuera de la experiencia local. En 1994, el artista sueco Ulf Roloff realizó una de las obras, *Estación de*

Ferrocarril, que iniciaría la discreta mutación de la plástica fronteriza reflejada en las futuras generaciones.

El artista colocó una vía férrea circular de dieciocho metros de diámetro en la vieja estación de ferrocarril de la Colonia Libertad, Tijuana, donde un viejo riel había servido en el pasado como vía de comunicación entre México y EE.UU. En esta metáfora sobre el eterno retorno, el riel circular ofrecía una alternativa de movimiento constante. El viajero improvisado veía el paisaje fronterizo a intervalos, filtrado por una cadena de árboles que el artista había colocado en los vagones. Los abetos, especie original de su país natal, confundían la visión de la frontera de igual forma que el bagaje cultural y social individual compone y modifica las impresiones de lo visto. “Un filtro cultural a través del cual el espectador debe ver esta cultura a la orilla del Pacífico”^v, decía Dave Hickey en el catálogo de INSITE 94.

Este desvío de la frontera como ente local inquebrantable fue abordado igualmente a través de otra de las obras que caracterizan el proyecto. *Century 21*, del artista tijuaneño Marcos Ramírez “ERRE” reproducía una favela de la desaparecida Zona Río de Tijuana, justo en el patio central del Centro Cultural Tijuana (CECUT). La instalación representaba una de las casitas que habían conformado la morfología de la malograda “cartolandia”, como escultura sobreviviente a las máquinas y el agua de la presa; pero sobre todo, al hambre de poder de quienes especulaban con los terrenos en la frontera, dado el valor adquirido a raíz de las multinacionales y la creciente población flotante. La recuperación de los espacios apuntaba al proceso soterrado de una Historia contada bajo una única perspectiva: la historia del trasplante como iniciativa de progreso, pero también la legitimidad de la propia institución^{vi}.

La especificidad dejaría de ser la barda en sí misma y su dualidad, dando paso al espacio fronterizo cotidiano y sus habitantes. Este sería el “descubrimiento” de Tijuana como lugar de experimentación artística, desviando la atención sobre el muro fronterizo. Para el artista alemán residente en San Diego, Olav Westphalen, después de esa primera edición, había dos estrategias a seguir para afrontar el espacio y la problemática de la frontera: Atacar frontalmente y crear una zona libre en territorio extranjero (como habían intentado “los artistas de la frontera”), o infiltrarse a través de estrategias de desvío hasta el propio corazón de la bestia. Con diferente fortuna, INSITE 94, se manejó entre ambas direcciones.

Oposiciones binarias

Los discursos de oposición binaria desarrollados por las políticas de identidad del arte chicano, primero y de las prácticas artísticas de los ochentas después, dejaban intacta la fisicidad de la frontera, incapaces de posibilitar cualquier cambio o dislocación del problema. La necesidad de definirse y construir una identidad seguía presente, no solo a partir del nacionalismo de “lo mexicano” sino a través de la interacción con “el otro”. Por otro lado los EE.UU. habían utilizado la estrategia de “atacar” culturalmente e ideológicamente a ese otro para consolidarse a sí mismos. Desde los nativos Americanos a los Soviéticos, su función había sido la de deshumanizar al otro a través del control, la explotación, y en muchos casos de la destrucción^{vii}. Por eso, la monumentalización de lo trágico y doloroso de la frontera impedía mantener una cierta distancia de reflexión. La solución artística sutil frente al activismo político sirvió de estandarte para INSITE, en su afán por desvincularse de las prácticas del pasado.

Es sin duda la obra del artista belga Francis Alÿs, *The loop* (1997), la que fundamentaría el desvío del evento hacia nuevas formas de operación, así como ejemplo para la

conceptualización de obras en las generaciones posteriores^{viii}. Alÿs se deshizo de la frontera y de su atrayente presencia física al mismo tiempo que consiguió explicitar el efecto devastador de su política sin tener que incidir sobre la tragedia del muro. Esta obra sería el disparadero de una serie de propuestas que hablarían de la frontera sin hacer uso de la misma, evitando incluso los símbolos que pudieran recordar su conformación político divisoria.

Para hablar de la frontera, no era necesario formar parte de ella (como había vaticinado Rollof). Era además novedosa por rehusar a tener presencia física de exhibición en un espacio caracterizado por la efectividad del sitio específico. *The loop*, utilizaba también el valor de la documentación; ante la invisibilidad de los hechos, la acción se materializaba en pruebas, datos confusos que demostraban la incertidumbre de la situación fronteriza. En la obra de Alÿs no había una lucha por la imagen, ni una pretendida colonización de lo visible en el espacio ya que conducía a un campo de lo invisible evidente^{ix}: la propia invisibilidad del recorrido en el evento. Al alejarse literalmente del paisaje fronterizo y cruzar todas las fronteras posibles, se destruía cualquier intento de oposición binaria: física y antropológica. La proposición también desafiaba esta noción al trasladar el problema concreto a una situación global llena de paradojas, donde era difícil explicar quién era la víctima y cual el victimario. La obra desviaba las reglas, consiguiendo superar la imposibilidad de la valla, sin que perdiese relevancia la crueldad de su geografía.

Es paradójico que, en este escenario de 1997, otra obra del artista tijuanense Marcos Ramírez “ERRE”, *Toy and Horse*, actuara por el camino contrario y fuera al mismo tiempo, estandarte del proyecto. La escultura de ERRE colocada en la garita de San Ysidro, consistía en un caballo de madera bicéfalo de diez metros de alto, representación icónica de su homólogo Troyano: dos cabezas que se orientaban en dos direcciones, corrompiendo la imagen elaborada del Norte invadiendo el Sur.

Es claro que México y EE.UU. son dos rivales con poder asimétrico, que en cierta forma han “depuesto” el enfrentamiento para establecer una relación estable. Incluso los medios de resistencia que el gobierno de México ejerce son parte del mismo dispositivo de poder y dominación que lo somete. Este tipo de relaciones de poder no están vinculadas por el simple hecho de colonizar o invadir a un colectivo de gente, sino que se producen bajo condiciones de interacción recíproca. En ese caso, la escultura bicéfala representaba la interacción entre ambos países pero no dejaba de ser una advertencia del eterno binomio de la víctima y el victimario. La radicalidad de su monumentalidad ponía nuevamente en relevancia la idea de oposición binaria. Y aunque para muchos fungía muy bien en el campo de la representación, poco podía remover más allá de lo que para todos era/es evidente.

Cuando los héroes sucumben ante la prepotencia

En su libro de 1974, *Postface*, Dick Higgins, uno de los principales exponentes del grupo Fluxus, compara el laborar de los miembros del grupo con otros artistas de la época, estableciendo una curiosa analogía entre dos caracteres literarios: *Doctor Fausto* de Thomas Mann y *Schweik* de Haroslav Hasek. El artista faustiano -maliciosamente descrito por Higgins- vislumbra el acto artístico como una vía superior de conocimiento y al artista como una suerte de héroe divino que encuentra en la defensa del más débil, la culminación de su epopeya dramática. Ante este héroe salvador de la víctima mortificada, se sitúa otro arquetipo: el artista convertido en el buen soldado Schweik^x, inconsciente y despreocupado de la imagen que proyecta de sí mismo, cansado de tropezar con una sociedad que lo subsume a la impotencia. El mundo puede explotar que él seguirá ahí, aparentemente

ajeno a las circunstancias. Algo así como la figura de un *trickster* discretamente situado fuera del bien y del mal, amputado de la responsabilidad de alumbrar la aparente verdad. La ineficacia de la oposición binaria encuentra una alternativa en el artista que abandona la figura de la oposición, disolviendo la idea de “Yo soy el otro”; en definitiva, alguien capaz (aunque sea solo en apariencia), de situarse desde fuera para no posicionarse en una situación de enfrentamiento directo, sin formar parte de un bando o de otro, estableciendo acciones que complejicen la situación o el elemento en discordia.

En una entrevista a Javier Téllez -que también participaría en la última edición del evento INSITE- afirmaba que, a principios de este nuevo milenio, el artista *trickster* sería el único eficaz políticamente dentro de la actividad creadora^{xi}. La figura del *trickster* se convertiría, tal y como dice la historiadora británica Jean Fisher, en la figura perfecta para una reposición del lenguaje como agencia subjetiva dentro del campo global^{xii}. Los buenos artistas no serían los que inventan un nuevo “idioma”, sino los que son capaces de exprimir los límites de éste. Los bordes del lenguaje abrazarían pues la frontera de lo *indecible*, a través de la locura camuflada, el desvío absurdo o la situación carnavalesca.

Esta figura de antihéroe puede ser en cierta forma explicada por el personaje de Carlos Amorales, con la obra que llevó a cabo en 2001, *Hombre Invisible/The Invisible man*. Otra de las obras que marcarían el devenir del evento y la conceptualización de INSITE posteriormente. Según palabras del propio artista, INSITE, a pesar de los “supuestos” esfuerzos por introducirse en la esfera pública fronteriza y convertirse en contexto familiar para sus habitantes, no dejaba de ser un tanto sectario.

Hacia años que Carlos Amorales estaba trabajando con máscaras, interesado por la capacidad de interacción que le proporcionaba este elemento con la audiencia. A través de la máscara, se convertía en otra persona y se le planteaba la posibilidad de salir fuera del espacio de la *performance* como sujeto, sin necesidad de moverse del sitio^{xiii}. Para su *performance* en Tijuana, Amorales se infiltró como representante de dos luchadores dentro del circuito tradicional de lucha –una de las actividades más populares en la zona-. Los espectadores eran conscientes de que estaban presenciando un espectáculo, pero no sabían que formaba parte de un evento artístico, aún menos del evento binacional INSITE. Al igual que la obra de Francis Alÿs, donde una “caminata” real por todo el planeta atentaba contra cualquier intento de simulacro, el ejercicio de Amorales se adentraba en la situación inmediata, en el momento y contexto real donde se desarrollaba la obra^{xiv}. Los Amorales – como llamó el artista a los dos luchadores a los que representaba-, eran perfectos como juego de palabras, acoplándose a la noción de sin-moral, expectantes del desarrollo de los acontecimientos, sin saber quién de los dos bandos iba acabar conquistando al otro^{xv}.

Los esencial sale de todos modos

No es de extrañar que George Yudice, hablara de INSITE como una suerte de maquiladora cultural^{xvi}. La pieza de Rollof de 1994, no solamente representó una metáfora de circulación de ideas, información e intercambio cultural en oposición a un determinismo localista, también inauguró un formato de bienal que se empezaba a ensayar de forma global en diferentes partes del mundo. A casi quince años del primer INSITE y algunos más de las políticas identitarias antes descritas por el arte de los ochenta o el proyecto chicano, la ciudad de Tijuana tampoco es ya la misma. Los estereotipos construidos desde afuera han dejado de estar de moda, quizá porque el estado de excepción que restringe la zona se extiende vertiginosamente hacia todo el Estado, en una estela violenta que ha dejado de ser una “exclusividad” norteña. Aunque las problemáticas han crecido y las

relaciones entre ambas ciudades han cambiado, el mapa cultural si presenta una cartografía diferente, sobre todo en lo que a la comunidad artística tijuanaense respecta. INSITE contribuyó a representar la frontera de otra forma incidiendo en la invisibilización y el desvío al discurso de poder dominante; pero además dio pie a una genealogía de lo contemporáneo: No solo en el ámbito creativo, sino también de mercado, institucional y educativo.

Una vez que la maquiladora cultural de la que hablaba Yudice encontró su forma de operar, las consecuencias eran inevitables, en todos los sentidos. Su creación permitió que el arte fronterizo adquiriera otra dimensión, y por primera vez hizo posible que en la región se llevaran a cabo grandes proyectos con presupuestos nunca antes manejados. Consiguió que instituciones muy importantes se propusieran colaborar y trabajar de forma conjunta, “salvando” las diferencias existentes entre ellas; Convocaron a un elenco de artistas internacionales y rehabilitaron espacios en desuso o prohibidos, clausurados al público por las reglas que imponía un lugar como la frontera.

En términos de gestión, INSITE posibilitó una estructura de trabajo que aun hoy en México no ha podido aplicarse de forma efectiva: abriría las puertas al capital privado que antes no había tenido ningún tipo de compromiso con la cultura; promovió la utilización de espacios en lugares inusuales para la intervención artística, que, en algunos casos, se convertirían en espacios de exposición para uso permanente. En la región de Tijuana no había escuelas de arte, y la mayoría de los artistas habían sido autodidactas o se formaron en México DF y los EE.UU. Desde 1993, INSITE ensayó otras formas de transformar los lenguajes locales, invitando a artistas jóvenes de la región a hacer sus estancias escolares en colaboración con el proyecto y poniéndoles en contacto directo con los artistas para asistirles en la realización de las obras. También se desarrollaron simposios académicos y programas educativos durante la exposición en el que se intercambian conferenciantes de ambos países orientados sobre todo al campo didáctico universitario y proveyendo de un contexto crítico a la práctica artística de la frontera. Estos intercambios han logrado que la influencia de algunos artistas de otras ciudades cercanas como Los Ángeles sea evidente en la práctica artística local.

En Tijuana se creó el pretencioso proyecto de El Cubo (Anexo del CECUT), un espacio para el arte contemporáneo internacional en combinación con las prácticas locales. Es curioso observar como la institucionalización de lo que para INSITE fu en su momento un ejercicio experimental, haya servido para que surjan otros proyectos independientes como Estación Tijuana, que sirven para exponer y reflexionar sobre las carencias de este espacio (El Cubo), que amenaza con convertirse en bastión del poder estatal.

No se podría asegurar a ciencia cierta si estas estructuras habrían surgido sin INSITE. De una u otra forma, la práctica fronteriza ya se había apagado cuando el evento surge en el territorio fronterizo, por lo que nunca se trató literalmente de una suplantación. Lo que está claro es que borró la falsa idea de que el arte debe ser un mecanismo de representatividad, provocando tensión entre las expectativas locales. Pero más allá de la infraestructura que generó o lo vacíos posteriores, la intención de utilizar el discurso de las obras a lo largo de este escrito para hablar de la genealogía del proyecto, sirve para rescatar las temáticas y metodologías de trabajo que, a mi parecer, han adoptado los artistas jóvenes en la zona fronteriza. Si bien el impacto en San Diego es muchísimo menor, en Tijuana definió nuevas formas narrativas. Lo interesante es cómo las nuevas generaciones han adoptado estas temáticas y las han hecho suyas, intensificando los procedimientos con la propia experiencia. De alguna forma, la romántica idea de resistir a lo global en las prácticas de los ochenta se puede concebir hoy en día través del cambio y el intercambio

como una dinámica de movilizar lo local. La resignificación de la memoria en los lugares ocultos de la ciudad, el abandono del concepto de oposición binaria y relaciones asimétricas a la par que una resignificación de Tijuana como lugar de actuación; el traslado del concepto de frontera geográfica a las diferentes acepciones que el significado de límite y cruce del mismo tiene en la formación del sujeto individual; La figura del supuesto *trickster* que desvía el discurso para, en el fondo, regresar conscientemente a la realidad más cercana.

Muchas de las instalaciones geográficamente delimitadas que se hacían en INSITE como evento binacional, se sustituyen hoy por acciones momentáneas, que tratan de incidir esporádicamente en los hábitos de conducta de los habitantes. Una forma de participar en el terreno de lo público que ha disuelto inclusive la propia noción de evento como espacio físico-temporal cuestionando la propia necesidad de un próximo INSITE. Más que romper los flujos de tráfico, se han unido a ellos; más que trazar una cartografía de los nuevos paisajes urbanos, se integraron a estos; más que interrumpir la sintaxis del día a día, ahí fueron a resguardar su arte. Muchos artistas siguen encontrando en lo cotidiano –y en la tradición– la única posibilidad para el cambio. Este espacio cotidiano es sin lugar a dudas un híbrido, pero este híbrido está tomando un cariz sólido, y no como un mero apunte folclórico. Ahora ya se sabe que Tijuana existe, y existe desde muchos puntos de vistas, precisamente por su diversidad. Muchos artistas tratan de escapar de la coacción totalitaria del lugar. Pero como en el viaje de Alÿs, son conscientes también de la negación que este espacio produce. Ya no tanto por un dogma cultural, sino por su deslizamiento al ocaso, y al estado de sitio.

Nada es en el fondo algo nuevo. Artistas fronterizos como Guillermo Gómez Peña, también habían trasladado la idea casi mística de “lo fronterizo” a un proceso interior de comportamiento humano, no exclusivo de la zona geográfica en cuestión. Inevitablemente, la demarcación política de los noventa y seis kilómetros de muro que separan Tijuana de San Ysidro, California, es un hecho que sigue rigiendo los asuntos de la ciudad, su política y sus interacciones sociales. Es también y será un eje simbólico el manantial identitario y mítico de ambas ciudades.

ⁱ Olivier Debroise. 1995. Extractos de la Tesis en Historia e Historia del Arte de Susan L.Shaw, *The Panama-California Exposition, San Diego 1915: Idelizing the past to Promote the Future*. Universidad de Yale, 1983, manuscrito inédito en el Catálogo INSITE94. Commercial Press, San Diego.

ⁱⁱ “...desdeñados al norte de la frontera por ser ciudadanos de segunda y al sur de la línea por ser mutantes sociales, los chicanos consagraron la región fronteriza como AZTLAN, un lugar conceptual fuera del marco sofocante de los dos países y envuelto en la aceptación y determinación propia en la historia, la política y el arte”. Goldman e Ybarra-Fausto: 1991.

ⁱⁱⁱ Patricio Chávez. 1992. *Políticamente cultural multi-correcta* en el catálogo de *La frontera/The border*. Centro Cultural la Raza. Ed. Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de San Diego (MCASD), San Diego. Pág. 13

^{iv} Entre los proyectos más destacados de su existencia, cabría mencionar el edificio del *Artist Resource Center*. Proyecto que, como tantos otros llevados a cabo en los EE.UU. estuvo parcialmente financiado por la NEA, aunque siempre fue necesario buscar financiamientos diversos con los que poder incrementar el plano de actuación y la calidad de los proyectos artísticos. N. del A.

^v Dave Hickey. 1995. *Sitegeist* en INSITE94. Ed. Installation Gallery, San Diego. Pág. 65

^{vi} Marcos Ramírez, reflexionaba directamente sobre el problema de la especulación del terreno por parte del gobierno, asimilando en la producción del jacal, el mismo método de acción que cualquier proyecto urbanístico; Fotos, maquetas, e incluso, una casa piloto para aquel que quisiera comprobar con sus propios ojos la futura casa del siglo 21. “Tomé como 300 fotos de diferentes casas en las laderas y de ahí confeccioné la mía, con materiales clásicos de construcción en Tijuana: las lantanas, las láminas, los colchones y todo eso. Yo hice unos paneles, uno de cartón, uno de llanta, uno de lámina y en una puerta vieja puse unas fotografías de las casas reales, la de la puerta vieja era una fotografía de una casa hecha con puras puertas, las de lámina, era la de una casa con pura lámina, la de llanta era una casa con lantanas, y tenía los modelos A,B,C,D, tu podías comprar una de esas casas que existían verdaderamente, entonces tenía que ver con eso, traer a este espacio la verdadera realidad de lo que vivimos en Tijuana.” Marcos Ramírez ERRE. 2000. *La flor en el pantano* en *Formas de resistencia, corredores de poder* en José Manuel Valenzuela- Arce.

Intrusiones compartidas. Arte y sociedad en la frontera de México/Estados Unidos. Ed. Fondo de Cultura Economía de México (FONCA). Pág. 30

^{vii} Guillermo Gomez Peña. 1995. "censura no es cultura" *From Armageddon to Gringostroika* en Mapping the Terrain Bay Press. Seattle, Washington Pág. 101-103.

^{viii} "Para viajar de Tijuana a San Diego sin cruzar la frontera entre México y EE.UU., tomaré una ruta perpendicular a la barda divisoria. Circunnavegaré la Tierra desplazándome 67° SE, luego hacia el NE y de nuevo hacia el SE, hasta llegar al punto de partida. Los objetos generados por el viaje darán fe de la realización del proyecto, mismo que quedará libre de cualquier contenido crítico más allá del desplazamiento físico del artista". Francis Alÿs.

^{ix} Por ejemplo la obra de Eduardo Abaroa, *Cápsulas Satánicas*, se basaba en un recorrido por una ruta que formaba una estrella de cinco picos; Miguel Calderón grabó un video que se basaba en su viaje en Taxi de México DF a Tijuana precisamente para entregar el propio video clip. N. del A.

^x Personaje protagonista de la novela del escritor checo Jaroslav Hasek. Destinado a servir en el frente durante la I Guerra Mundial, Schweik utiliza su racional sentido común para invertir los mandatos del poder. Hasek juega con el lector creándole la disyuntiva de si Schweik es un absoluto genio capaz de desenmascarar la verdad o el más completo de los idiotas. N. Del A.

^{xi} "Siempre me ha molestado la arrogancia de la figura del artista contemporáneo como falso Chamán de la tribu, del cual abundan ejemplos en nuestras tierras". Javier Téllez.

^{xii} Jean Fisher. "Towards a Metaphysics of Shit", in *Documenta 11 Platform 5 The Catalog*, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hajte Cantz, 2002, pp 63-70

^{xiii} *Para que un mundo extrapersonal pueda entrar, yo tengo que salir. (Tengo que dejar la sala para que ese mundo entre y no simplemente aporte un ambiente, un fondo a "mi persona".)* Según Acconci, la relación que se crea entre el público y el artista a través del *performance*, es una relación recíproca donde el artista debe de compartir su espacio para que los espectadores puedan involucrarse, no sólo físicamente sino sensorialmente. El *performance* ideal según Acconci, es aquel en el que el marco de la obra, permite compartir un ambiente único para el artista y el público, evitando que "la cuarta pared" se convierta en un muro infranqueable. Vito Acconci. 2004. *Pasos hacia la Performance* en Arte y Parte n° 49. Editorial Arte y Parte S.L. Pág. 69.

^{xiv} *A mí por ejemplo me gustó mucho la obra de Francis Alÿs, se me hace realmente buena. Es interesante la idea de la negación. Pero también creo que es bastante válido afrontar las cosas como individuo. Viajar allí y ver que se puede descubrir, pero también asumiendo que tienes que crear una realidad, ya sea la lucha libre o cualquiera otra, donde interfieras con tu participación. Yo traté de crear un mundo, con toda la energía, casi creando una estructura social hay dentro. Llegar a ese lugar casi como un parásito y vivirlo durante dos semanas. Eso es lo que hizo de alguna manera también Diego Gutiérrez, que acabó viviendo en sus micronúcleos.* Entrevista a Carlos Amoraes. 2003. México DF.

^{xv} *Intento que los símbolos que utilizo tengan el máximo de significado posible y que sean muy generales. Por ejemplo la máscara que utilice para los Amoraes, era una máscara pelona, y todos empezaron a gritar ¡Salinas, Salinas! Pero en ningún momento yo trate de hacer una máscara que se pareciera a Carlos Salinas.* Entrevista a Carlos Amoraes. 2003. México DF

^{xvi} "La audiencia binacional en de gran interés para actores políticos e intelectuales. Esta multi-audiencia, multipropuesta y multi-labor debe ser producida. Y es en este proceso de producción donde el teatro y la maquiladora trabajan bien, súper imponiéndose el uno a la otra. Tengo que añadir que he usado esta metáfora de la maquiladora, no para sugerir que hay algo siniestro entre este proceso de trabajo que aliena la labor del artista, sino para focalizarlo en el puro hecho de la producción (del trabajo del arte, de las interacciones, de las audiencias y de las múltiples formas de capitalismo cultural." George Yudice. 2000. *Producing the cultural economy: The collaborative art of INSITE*. Ed. New York University. Pág. 2.

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Transnational Latin American Art

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Beyond Nationalism.
Diego Rivera and the artistic creation “For Peace”.

When Mexican art of the twentieth century is considered, themes like politics, nationalism, muralism and revolution, are usually related. Important studies about that art of have been developed in current historiography in trying to define its character and artistic identity. However, there hasn't been that much research about the final moments of the “Mexican Renaissance”.

This analysis points out the moment of change in the aesthetic program of Diego Rivera, a few years before his death in 1957. One of his last works is taken as example: *Gloriosa Victoria* (1954). In doing so it is intended to demonstrate the transformation in the international cultural system during the early stages of the Cold War, and how it defined an alternative path in realistic Mexican art, when it was going through a condition of crisis and questioning. These Rivera's paintings do not reflect national situations, great historical myths, nor local characters or heroes, instead of that their subject matters are international issues, defined by a specific political thought.

To explain the motivations that drove these two paintings into existence, it is necessary (as in most of Rivera's creations) to understand the dynamics set in motion in Diego Rivera regarding politics in general, and in this case particularly

international ones. He was part of the group of intellectuals that constituted the “International Peace Movement”. This collective, formed by Joliot Curie, Linus Pauling, Georg Lukács, Paul Éluard, Louis Aragon, Pablo Picasso, Pablo Neruda, among other thinkers and scientists, organized several congresses and meetings. Their main objective was to stop the use of nuclear weapons by the U.S.A. Every meeting had specific results, either in the field of discussion or in the creative realm. These conferences worked as deliberation points, ways for cultural exchange and, places of aesthetic and political debate. Diego Rivera was involved in the “International Peace Conference” in Paris in 1949, in the “American Continental Congress of Peace” celebrated in Mexico and in the “World Peace Congress” of 1953.

The works that that will be studied, both had to do with these conferences, and exhibit symbols and new ways of thinking that are related to the international peace movement. This way it is possible to raise different questions: How did soviet politics affect Diego Rivera’s ways for plastic creation and aesthetic definition? Which political ideas did Rivera stood by during these years and how he related with his own trotskyst past? What made him combine the national subjects with the international events?

In this way, this paper is intended to start up musing the work, the ways of thinking and the experience of Diego Rivera in his last years. At the same time the Mexican artistic context is considered, where the importance of “realistic painting” was repeatedly discussed, in combination with the international political situation, which took from the peace subject its new political and artistic thematics.

Más allá del nacionalismo. Diego Rivera y la creación artística “Por la Paz.” De la figuración simbólica al realismo portátil

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Y si admitimos que, aunque sea dentro de una guerra fría, pueden convivir el socialismo y el capitalismo, ¿por qué en un país donde los intereses de la masa obrera y campesina son diametralmente opuestos a los de la burguesía, en su mayoría pro imperialista y colonialista, no hemos admitir la convivencia de tendencias artísticas que representan a estas capas sociales?
Diego Rivera¹

El presente texto expone el caso del mural portátil *Gloriosa Victoria* hecho por Diego Rivera en 1954. Con este ejemplo se busca exhibir una etapa en la que Rivera modificó sus estrategias hacia otros intereses, tanto técnicas, como teóricas, que indudablemente lo llevaron por otro tipo de soluciones plásticas.² Si se hace un recuento de sus últimas obras llama la atención inmediatamente el radicalismo y la divergencia sobre otras elaboradas en décadas anteriores: *La Universidad, la familia y el deporte en México* del Estadio de Ciudad Universitaria (1952-1954), *El agua, origen de la vida* para el Cárcamo del Río Lerma (1951), *Pesadilla de Guerra. Sueño de Paz* (1952), *La Historia de la Medicina en México* en el Hospital La Raza (1953-1954), El Museo Anahuacalli (1941-1964) y por supuesto, *Gloriosa Victoria*.

Este análisis propone una posibilidad de lectura sobre un período de la obra de Diego Rivera distinto, ya que como Loló de la Torre describió: “Entre 1950 y 1954, realiza una nueva etapa de arte vital, mientras ensaya técnicas y recoge materiales

¹ Luis Suárez, *Confesiones de Diego Rivera* (México, Era, 1962),165.

² Mi compañero en la catalogación del Fondo de la Fundación Diego Rivera A.C., Daniel Vargas Parra, se ha enfocado en estudiar los casos de integración plástica riveriana. Ver “Juegos de basalto. De la integración plástica y su resistencia en el Estadio Universitario” (MA. diss., Historia del Arte, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, UNAM, 2009). Actualmente realiza su investigación de doctorado en la UNAM sobre *El Anahuacalli*. Agradezco a él los comentarios y sugerencias sobre el texto.

para el Hospital de la Raza, pinta la fachada, curva hacia fuera, del Teatro de los Insurgentes.”³ Por lo que hay que tomar en cuenta estos cambios y ofrecer una diferenciación por medio de ejemplos concretos.

Parecería también que si algo caracterizó los últimos años en la vida de Rivera fue la defensa ante distintos ataques, tanto en el plano artístico, como en el ideológico. Años atrás Rivera gozó de la fama internacional y del reconocimiento de su obra, aunque la polémica fue algo siempre presente en la mayoría de sus trabajos. Pablo Neruda después de su estancia en México entre 1949 y 1950, reconoció esta cualidad de Rivera:

Diego Rivera seguía siendo gran maestro de la pintura y de la fabulación. Aconsejaba comer carne humana como dieta higiénica y de grandes *gourmets*. Daba recetas para cocinar gente de todas las edades [...] Su tono de persuasión extraordinario y su calmosa manera de dar los detalles más ínfimos e inesperados de sus mentiras, hacían de él un charlatán maravilloso, cuyo encanto nadie que lo conoció puede olvidar jamás. ⁴

Esta fama de mitómano empedernido lo llevaría en ciertas ocasiones a enfrentar problemas que muchas veces confrontaron su propia obra, tal y como sucedió en la realización de *Gloriosa Victoria*. Para 1954 Rivera había tenido varios problemas dentro de su propio país y podría decirse que muchas de sus acciones ya no resultaban de la misma manera a la que estaba acostumbrado.⁵

En agosto de 1954 Diego Rivera recibió una invitación para participar en la exposición de arte mexicano dedicada a Varsovia, Polonia, organizada por el Frente

³ Loló de la Torriente, *Memoria y razón de Diego Rivera* (México, Editorial Renacimiento S.A., 1959), 347. Continúa de la Torriente: “Resulta muy difícil, casi imposible, establecer una cronología exacta de las obras de Diego Rivera porque trabajaba simultáneamente en varias y nunca las daba por terminadas. [...] En los años finales se complacía más ante un dibujo de infancia o un óleo de juventud que ante un mural de los años maduros a los que solía volver la espalda. Era una protesta contra sí mismo. Un descontento que exigía a su vocación el máximo rendimiento.”

⁴ Pablo Neruda, *Confieso que he vivido. Memorias* (Barcelona, Círculo de Escritores, 1975), 168.

⁵ Pasó por ejemplo, en la cancelación de su trabajo de integración plástica para el Estadio Universitario, después de varias diatribas y acusaciones en su contra, o a través de los problemas que tuvo su obra *Pesadilla de Guerra. Sueño de Paz* con el gobierno de Miguel Alemán.

Nacional de Artes Plásticas.⁶ En correspondencia con dicho organismo Rivera expuso las características de la obra que delegaría para esa ocasión: “El mural movable que preparo mide 5 ms de largo por 2.30 de alto; se titula ‘Gloriosa Victoria’ y se refiere a la agresión imperialista contra Guatemala.”⁷ El título fue tomado de la declaración que John Fuster Dulles hizo ante la caída de Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, al definirla como “una gloriosa victoria para la democracia.”⁸ La selección del tema, técnica y características de la obra estaban vinculadas, a decir de Rivera, especialmente para “una cultura estética, social y política tan alta y desarrollada dentro de lo moderno como antigua y espléndida en su tradición, como es el público de la República Popular de Polonia.”⁹ Por lo que las estrategias para la realización de la obra tuvieron cualidades particulares.

A pesar de haber establecido ciertos acuerdos entre la institución cultural y el pintor, comenzaron a suscitarse diversos problemas en torno a la entrega y participación de la pieza de Rivera, puesto que se había establecido en la selección de las obras “el procurar temas no políticos”. Rivera dejó claro en una carta a Boleslaw Jelen, embajador en México de la Legación de Polonia, los obstáculos en el envío del mural:

“El ya nombrado Márquez Rodiles, hizo oposición sistemática al envío de mi mural

⁶ El Frente Nacional de Artes Plásticas estaba conformado por diversas figuras del mundo artístico y cultural mexicano: Presidente, Francisco Goitia; Secretario General, Rosendo Soto; Secretario de Organización Miguel Salas Anzures, Secretario de Asuntos Educativos, Ignacio Márquez Rodiles; así como José Chávez Morado y Xavier Guerrero.

⁷ “Correspondencia entre Diego Rivera y el Frente Nacional de Artes Plásticas”. Archivo Personal Diego Rivera, Fundación Diego Rivera A.C. Serie Instituciones, Expediente Frente Nacional de Artes Plásticas, Foja 3. Al ser un acervo que permanece fuera de uso, la información sobre su clasificación puede variar.

⁸ Carlos Fuentes, “Arbenz, Goulart, Allende”, *El País*, 5 abril, 1995, 9. Con este hecho, afirmó Fuentes, “las bases para un desarrollo democráticos fueron criminalmente frustrados.” Una buena reseña de los sucesos sería “El presidente Arbenz, “la gloriosa victoria” y la lección de Guatemala, Guatemala, Centros de Estudios Urbanos y Regionales, Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, 1992, Núm. 2, Serie de Documentos para la Historia, 30 p.

⁹ *Idem.*

transportable ‘Gloriosa Victoria’, pintado para esta Exposición que, como usted conoce, está destinado a denunciar con claridad ante el público de la Democracia Popular y las Repúblicas Socialistas Soviéticas, la acción infame del imperialismo norteamericano en Guatemala.”¹⁰

Ante las distintas razones que pudieron frenar el envío, Rivera enfatizó un combate en contra del realismo como la principal de ellas. ¿En qué contexto de discusión sobre el realismo se hace referencia? y ¿qué mecanismos utilizó Rivera en sus últimas obras para defender su propuesta plástica? Esta investigación abre una pauta hacia estas problemáticas y da una primera respuesta, basada en los cambios de su pintura en esos años y tomando en cuenta la propia definición plástica de la obra.

Para comenzar el análisis es necesario referir las características del mural. Se trata de una pintura hecha a base de temple de yema sobre tela,¹¹ con un tema de la política internacional. En un artículo, hasta ahora anónimo, presente en uno de los archivos del muralista, se deja claro que esta obra formó parte de una nueva etapa en la plástica riveriana. Llama la atención al autor la declaración de Rivera, en la que presumía que los primeros trazos de esta pieza se habían realizado el mismo día en que Rivera fue readmitido en el Partido Comunista Mexicano, después de varios procesos de investigación. Si esto fuera cierto, habría comenzado a pintar *Gloriosa Victoria* el 26 de septiembre de 1954.¹² Una característica importante de este texto es que ofrece

¹⁰ “Correspondencia entre Diego Rivera y Boleslaw Jelen”, en *Diego Rivera. Obras Completas. Correspondencia* (México, Colegio de México, 1999) 185.

¹¹ Rina Lazo, ayudante de Rivera para realizar ese mural, describió las especificaciones de la técnica. Entrevista con Rina Lazo, México, 9 de noviembre de 2009.

¹² Diego Rivera dio como primera fecha de culminación de la pieza el 10 de octubre, sin embargo la entrega se dio hasta el 20 de noviembre de 1954. Los distintos cuestionarios y declaraciones que Diego Rivera hizo para lograr su admisión son por ejemplo: “Solicitud de reingreso al Partido Comunista” o “Documento que elabora Diego Rivera a indicación de la comisión de México en respuesta a las preguntas formuladas por ella.”, Raquel Tibol, Selección, prólogo, notas y datos biográficos, *Diego Rivera, Arte y política*, (México, Grijalbo, 1978) 339-344 y 347-356.

además, datos importantes en la vía de análisis de la pintura bajo los términos del realismo. Aseguró el crítico en el artículo: “Recuerdo que conversando con Antonio Rodríguez, a mediados de noviembre, cuando éste fue a ver el mural, Diego le decía ‘creo que en este mural he llegado a eliminar todo simbolismo, toda alegoría’... Antonio Rodríguez contestó: ‘es la obra de más puro realismo que he conocido’.”¹³ Este realismo fue logrado por Rivera, según explicó, a partir de la construcción de un escena clara y precisa de los acontecimientos y por medio de la interpretación de los documentos e información que obtuvo al respecto, con lo que aseguró llegar a romper las escenas alegóricas con el fin de lograr la conformación de “verdades exactas”.

Rina Lazo, discípula de Rivera, recordó cómo inició el tratamiento de la obra, así como la protesta que se desató en México en torno al golpe de estado, la cual apoyó tanto a ella, como a los compañeros guatemaltecos Luis Cardoza y Aragón y Miguel Ángel Asturias. El punto relevante es que Rivera reaccionó de inmediato ante la acción en contra de Guatemala, lo cual lo llevó a la búsqueda de una escena fuerte e intensa que lograra materializar ese acto violento en una imagen. Lazo comentó de qué forma se vivió este hecho:

En 1953, una incipiente democracia surgía en Guatemala. Vivía un momento nuevo de su historia con una nueva experiencia democrática, la puerta de la casa azul de Coyoacán estaba adornada con dos banderas entrecruzadas: la guatemalteca y la mexicana, que mostraban al barrio la solidaridad de los maestros a la causa de América. Después de defender su soberanía, Guatemala es agredida en junio de 1954 y el gobierno de Jacobo Arbenz derrocado, la caída del gobierno democrático conmocionó a toda América Latina levantando numerosas protestas.¹⁴

Sería la propia Lazo quien daría a su maestro los documentos e imágenes para que Rivera tuviera las fuentes apropiadas y fuera pertinente la referencia al

¹³ “Gloriosa Victoria”, Archivo Diego Rivera, CENIDIAP, Serie Obra Mural, Expediente Gloriosa Victoria, Foja 1.

¹⁴ Rina Lazo *Diego y Frida vistos por Rina Lazo* en Coloquio Internacional. Una cinta que envuelve una bomba, <http://www.arteamerica.cu/14/debates/rinalazo.htm>, (consultada el 15 de agosto de 2009).

acontecimiento. Lazo buscó fotografías sobre los hechos, los trajes típicos de los indígenas guatemaltecos y cualquier referencia que ayudara a Diego a dar veracidad en la representación.¹⁵

Las consecuencias del ataque ante Guatemala provocaron que Rivera olvidara el retrato que estaba elaborando de Dionisio Encinas, dirigente del Partido Comunista Mexicano, y se viera obligado a representar el hecho histórico de manera inmediata. Dicho acto expresaba una parte transitoria característica del arte moderno, como habría definido Charles Baudelaire, puesto que responde a una autocomprensión del autor ante la actualidad de su tiempo.¹⁶

El objetivo de Diego Rivera era la construcción de un realismo extremo por medio de la conformación de verdades exactas sobre un hecho, en este caso sobre un acontecimiento inmediato. Este aspecto parece contradictorio: ¿de qué manera es posible captar el acontecimiento en una verdad objetiva?¹⁷ Esa fue una cualidad de Rivera, hacer creer que su interpretación e investigación de los hechos históricos es verosímil. Algo similar sucede en su trabajo para el Palacio Nacional en una última etapa o en *Sueño de una tarde dominical en la Alameda Central*. Parece que el retrato de la vida cotidiana en los mercados prehispánicos o de la historia de México por medio de sus personajes es “tal y como sucedió”. Sin embargo, todo responde a una construcción específica. La imagen permite que se cree una versión sintética y condensada de los acontecimientos por medio de la multireferencialidad, que busca en

¹⁵ Ante la petición de Rivera, un día llevó una blusa roja puesto que, “me pidió que posara como guerrillera con un rifle en la mano.” También tendría la oportunidad de pintar su propio “cuadro” sobre el mural, al realizar la escena de la cárcel.

¹⁶ María Jesús Godoy Domínguez, “El pintor de la vida moderna de Charles Baudelaire”, *Fedro, Revista de Estética y Teoría de las Artes*, Núm. 7, septiembre 2008, 3.

¹⁷ Esta problemática fue expuesta por Immanuel Kant en el texto “¿Qué es la Ilustración?”. En Michael Foucault, *Saber y Verdad* (Madrid, Las Ediciones de la Piqueta, 1991), 197-207.

el ejemplo de *Gloriosa Victoria* ir más allá del testimonio fotográfico y de la narración histórica, en donde Rivera “resume y resume el crimen” para dar el testimonio “exacto”.

La diferencia entre la figuración que realizó en años anteriores, era el sentido simbólico que Rivera buscó en las obras pasadas. Loló de la Torriente diferenció estas dos etapas. Por un lado, está la conformación del mito y la representación de la historia nacional. Un tipo de “lírica pero filosófica”. Para De la Torriente: “(Rivera) Tiene los ojos abiertos y por ellos se ha colado la realidad que lo ayuda, de manera dialéctica, a desentrañar la verdad relatando y sintetizando”.¹⁸ La cubana descifró un método que desdibuja lo individual para conformar lo social y define lo nacional dentro de lo universal, “de lo dogmático a lo realista y de lo simbólico a lo objetivo”.¹⁹ El cambio que hizo Rivera para este mural dentro de su concepción de realismo, fue la reunión de distintos documentos históricos que referirían de forma concreta y selectiva del acontecimiento en una escena de denuncia. La síntesis fue realizada por medio de la temática, la técnica y la composición, que variaban en varios aspectos con sus murales anteriores. Fue una manera radical de exhibición, a partir de una ruptura para dar paso a la veracidad, por medio de un método que propuso “exaltar con gloria apreciable, atacar con furia implacable lo deseable.”²⁰

Para el caso de Guatemala Rivera decidió no evadir esa realidad de lucha, sino hacer evidente “la realidad desagradable o amenazadora”.²¹ El objetivo fue que hubiera una respuesta inmediata con la exhibición de la obra. Desde el momento en que Rivera

¹⁸ De la Torriente, *op.cit*, p. 350.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.351.

²⁰ “Respuestas al cuestionario del señor redactor de la revista *Europe*, de París en *Ibid*, p. 672.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 653.

presentó la pieza la polémica comenzó, aunque no en los términos que Diego habría esperado.

Los conflictos iniciaron con el Frente Nacional de Artes Plásticas y posteriormente se dio una larga discusión sobre el resultado de su trabajo, que justamente atacaba la representación riveriana de los acontecimientos. La Embajada de Guatemala encabezó una acusación por medio de la prensa, a partir de las declaraciones de Mario Alvarado Rubio, consejero de prensa de la legación, quien aseguraba que Rivera había mentido sobre los hechos expuestos en su mural: “Rivera vuelve a mentir. Falto de argumentos recurre al insulto procaz”.²² Rivera reaccionó de inmediato y comenzó su defensa, basada en su propia definición del realismo y en la forma de realización para este trabajo en particular. De hecho, expuso al embajador Jelen en qué términos se insertaba esa acusación dentro del contexto de diatribas hacia el arte realista, con el fin de guiar su argumento: “Actualmente hay un viraje en contra en el ataque contra el realismo socialista, por lo que a mí concierne; se exalta el periodo de mi pintura cubista en París, anterior a mi esfuerzo por volver a realismo, en 1918, y por otra se hace énfasis calumnioso en la estimación e inadmisibilidad de mi trabajo en la URSS.”²³ Lo que Rivera pretendía era aclarar que todos los comentarios contrarios resultaban una estrategia del ataque imperialista, que manejaba un descrédito de su propia obra y propuesta plástica. Lo que intentaba Rivera en esos años era desviar el argumento que validara la abstracción purista, para construir en cambio una defensa del realismo que entendería el trabajo de la abstracción bajo otro sentido, ya que no lo negaba, si no que explicaba su función en la configuración de una imagen específica y

²² “Repite Diego” en *Impacto*, 12 de Febrero, (1955): 4.

²³ “Correspondencia entre Diego Rivera y Boleslaw Jelen”, en *Diego Rivera. Obras Completas. op.cit.*, p.185.

que lo vinculaba y ponía sobre la balanza frente al arte soviético de forma muy particular.

Rivera respondía en esos años a cuestionamientos nacionales e internacionales sobre el mercado artístico internacional. La prensa exhortaba a que el muralista realizara una comparación entre esas propuestas y su propio trabajo.²⁴ Por ejemplo, la revista *Europe* lo cuestionó sobre el desenvolvimiento del realismo, a lo que Rivera respondió:

La lucha mundial entre realismo y abstraccionismo en todos los matices, desde lo semi-abstracto hasta el neo-representacionismo purista, tiene una clara raíz humana. Las sociedades o clases interesadas en su propia realidad, sea por estar satisfechas de ella, por querer saber objetivamente lo que necesitan adquirir para mejorar su condición o lucha por sus intereses culturales, demandan de la obra de arte la presentación clara y precisa, objetiva y subjetiva, de las circunstancias de esa realidad, es decir, el espejo fiel de la situación histórica en la que vive.²⁵

Es bajo este sistema Rivera operó para tratar el caso de Guatemala. Expuso, a partir de ciertos testimonios, una escena precisa que diera cuenta de su propia realidad e hiciera reaccionar sobre el modo de actuar del imperialismo ante un hecho histórico específico. Lo importante era realizar por medio de la selección de personajes y de momentos particulares del hecho histórico, una interpretación que resultara clara en su lectura y bajo una referencia directa. Un mural que lograra un equilibrio entre figuración, experimentación formal, técnica y temática “de la masa y para las masas”. Tres elementos permiten otorgar el carácter de mural a la obra de *Gloriosa Victoria*. ¿Qué le otorga esta característica? ¿qué lo hace un mural y no una obra de caballete muy grande?

²⁴ Se pueden consultar varias entrevistas en las que Rivera expone estas problemáticas. Por ejemplo, “Catorce preguntas a Rivera en su regreso de la URSS”, “Respuestas dadas por Diego Rivera al cuestionario presentado por el Sr. Leo Sauvage, corresponsal en Nueva York de Le Figaro de París” de 1956 y “Contestaciones del pintor Diego Rivera al cuestionario presentado por la Srta. Ramos, corresponsal de periódico O’Globo” de 1957. Estos textos están compilados en *Diego Rivera. Obras Completas. Textos Polémicos (1950-1957)* (México, Colegio Nacional, 1999).

²⁵ “Respuestas al cuestionario del señor redactor de la revista *Europe*, de París” en *Ibid*, p. 671.

La definición que Rivera hizo de un mural portátil está relacionada con el uso de la pintura mural como medio de propaganda, si no esa pieza sería simplemente un ejemplo más del *artepurismo*. El desarrollo de la técnica del mural transportable comenzó en Estados Unidos con la serie *El retrato de Norteamérica* de 1933, hechos para el New Workers' School por petición de su fundador Bertram Wolfe.²⁶ La decisión de hacer esta nueva propuesta mural respondió a nuevas exigencias para representar ciertos temas, en este caso históricos internacionales, así como en el modo de propaganda y recepción que se buscaba consolidar.²⁷ La técnica continuó siendo el fresco, aunque realizó adecuaciones por medio de un bastidor metálico para que tuvieran la posibilidad de movimiento y transporte.

Sin embargo, para el mural de *Gloriosa Victoria* Rivera varió la técnica. El trabajo fue realizado en temple sobre tela, lo cual ofrecía un sentido distinto al significado de la obra. Para 1953 Rivera habría comenzado a experimentar con las posibilidades del bastidor metálico en el mural de mosaico vítreo montado en la fachada del Teatro de los Insurgentes.²⁸ No obstante, *Gloriosa Victoria* no se hizo con este mecanismo de bastidor, y en cambio se conformó como una obra de doble vista que exhibiría sólo

²⁶ Habría que hacer una diferenciación y estudio especializado sobre las distintas propuestas de Rivera en obra portátil. Como base de la reflexión, se debe revisar el texto de Anna Indych-López "Mexican muralism without walls: The critical reception of portable work by Orozco, Rivera and Siqueiros in the United States, 1927-1940" (PhD. diss. Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 2003). Indych-lópez trabajó los murales de Diego Rivera dedicados a la exhibición en Estados Unidos. Éstos trabajos serían la base de los murales móviles que desarrollaría posteriormente, ya que el cambio sería su conformación bajo un sentido enfocado en la función de uso.

²⁷ Para explicar el sentido de la obra como mercancía y su función bajo este aspecto económico, tomé como referencia *El Capital* de Carlos Marx: "Mercancía es todo aquello que es útil a la vida del hombre, nada importa que esa utilidad concierna al aparato digestivo o a la imaginación" citado en Diego Rivera, "Arte Antiguo Mexicano" en *Ibid*, p. 640.

²⁸ "La representación fue pintada directamente sobre un aplanado provisional y recubierta después con teselas de vidrio esmaltadas para conformar un mosaico monumental." Diego Rivera, *Epopéya Mural* (México, INBA, CONACULTA, Landucci, 2007), 325.

una de sus caras. Lo importante sería el carácter que Rivera le otorgaba al denominarlo “mural movable”:

En cuanto a la pintura transportable, representa en la obra de Rivera dos tipos de trabajo: el documento, que es la traducción directa de la realidad con objeto de darle materia prima para el desarrollo de sus composiciones, y los cuadros, que sin ser pintura de agitación continúan siendo propaganda como toda pintura.²⁹

El arte transportable ofrecía la posibilidad de acercamiento a las masas y de exhibición inmediata del hecho. La decisión de la técnica es importante, puesto que reitera los objetivos de la obra. La cualidad que el temple otorga es el uso de materiales naturales, no industriales. A pesar de estar constituido por elementos orgánicos, la técnica presenta una característica de durabilidad. La combinación entre sus elementos hace posible que al secarse, en un tiempo corto a diferencia de técnicas como el óleo, el resultado material sea una capa solidificada. Ésta permite que tenga un carácter de perdurabilidad, por lo que llega a ser considerada como una de las técnicas antiguas más nobles.³⁰ El material al no ser efímero, sino perdurable, no recurre al concepto de compra-venta constante. Lo cual, pone en duda la categoría estética moderna de lo efímero, y la lleva hacia otra categoría del arte como mercancía. En este caso se da una conscientización de su producción y se convierte en un objeto que tiene las propiedades para satisfacer de alguna manera las necesidades humanas.³¹ Por esta característica de durabilidad la escena no sólo representa un

²⁹ Diego Rivera, “Raíces políticas y motivos personales de la controversia Siqueiros-Rivera. Stalinismo vs bolchevismo leninista”, en *Arte y política, op.cit*, 119.

³⁰ Para una explicación adecuada sobre como se prepara el temple tradicional ver: Cennino Cennini, *El libro del arte* (Madrid, Akal, 2002),180-185.

³¹ El proceso de producción es descrito por Carlos Marx en el texto “La tecnología del capital”. Bolívar Echeverría, selección y traducción *La tecnología del capital. Subsunción formal y subsunción real del proceso del trabajo al proceso de valoración. (Extractos del manuscrito de 1861-1863)*, (Editorial Ítaka, 2005). Publicado originalmente en *Cua-dernos Políticos*, núm. 37, julio-septiembre, ERA, México, 1983. Rivera establece esa conexión con el arte en el texto *Lenin en el arte*. Ver Lenin en el arte, Archivo Fundación Diego Rivera A.C., Serie Textos, Expediente 23, folio 4. Daniel Vargas ha estudiado el caso en “La cura por el arte. La estética de Diego Rivera”, *Milenio Diario*, 25 de Noviembre, 2007, sección QrR!.

acontecimiento preciso, sino que además, obtiene posibilidades de resistencia y permanencia en su uso. Con ello que las expectativas de movilidad y propaganda sean pertinentes, porque el temple cumplía tanto con la cualidad orgánico-constructiva, casi arquitectónica, que en combinación ofrecería un efecto concreto en la recepción.

Para el caso de *Gloriosa Victoria* conviene revisar el relato que hace a Alfredo Cardona Peña sobre el realismo riveriano para complementar la reflexión. Rivera explicó al poeta que al mirar una buena construcción realista el espectador cree estar viendo la copia precisa de algo determinado, “cree mirar una vista, una fotografía del natural allí donde hay precisamente lo contrario.”³² Lo que se necesita para tener una imagen con estos referentes, a decir de Rivera, es un conjunto de formas y colores perfectamente abstractos que han sido ordenados según la libertad del artista, llegando de esta manera a algo concreto, lo que podría denominarse como “realismo superior”. Un pintor realista puede llegar a que el espectador conciba la veracidad y claridad de la escena, “dado que la pintura es un lenguaje que se expresa con color para crear una realidad plástica con él.”³³ Bajo estos términos, Rivera aplicaría su propia definición plástica en el mural transportable.

Volviendo a la polémica contra Rivera. Se le acusó de mentir en su exposición de los hechos acontecidos en Guatemala, a lo que el pintor reaccionó argumentado “verdad exacta” en la representación. Por medio del uso de fuentes y testimonios y, sobre todo, mediante la selección de los aspectos representativos del suceso, Rivera presumió conseguir que su obra fuera netamente realista, ante la creencia en la necesidad de una representación vital a través de la objetivación.

³² Alfredo Cardona Peña, *op.cit.*, p.53.

³³ *Idem.*

La publicación *Impacto* dedicó un estudio de *Gloriosa Victoria* basado en la explicación de Rivera sobre la conformación de la obra. El artículo se dividió en dos secciones. Una gráfica que a manera de diagrama explicaba cada figura de la escena, complementada con una segunda parte en la que se presentaba el resultado final de la obra, por medio de la narración de los hechos con lo que se lograba entender la síntesis e interpretación de Rivera. Sobre el diagrama se explicaba: “Al fin de llevar a los lectores de *Impacto* una explicación comprensible sobre el tema del reciente mural de Diego Rivera, que ha suscitado una polémica candente, hemos realizado este dibujo por el cual mediante siluetas el lector conocerá las personas y asuntos dibujados en su incendiario panfleto.”³⁴ En seguida, se enlistaron los nombres de cada elemento correspondiente con el número de la figura, del 1 al 19. El trato de los personajes comienza con el “Quirigua”, Barco de la United Fruit; continúa con Carlos Castillo Armas, Allan Dulles, ex-presidente de la United Fruit, Fuster Dulles, canciller de Guatemala, Monseñor Verolino, Delegado del Papa en Guatemala, y de manera crítica, al mostrarlo como una bomba de “altísima potencia”, al Presidente de los Estados Unidos, Dwight D. Eisenhower. Otros elementos de la escena refieren a lugares específicos y representativos en Guatemala: la Catedral, la Embajada de México, los plataneros guatemaltecos y el Volcán de Agua.

La obra es característica por su complejidad compositiva y cromática. Resalta una paleta brillante, poco usual en Rivera y que comenzó a poner en práctica poco tiempo atrás como parte de su experimentación plástica. Sobre la composición, la figura de Eisenhower resulta el eje por el cual se va estructurando todo lo demás. Es la figura de donde surge todo el conflicto narrativo de la escena. La factura de las figuras es

³⁴ “Yo no miento grita Diego”, *Impacto*, enero de 1955, No. 268.

detallada y trata a cada una de ellas con particularidad que conlleva a la caracterización crítica de cada personaje. La composición casi se encuentra en un primer plano, por lo que la escena parece salir del lienzo hacia el espectador. Este efecto ofrece un impacto más intenso al momento de la recepción, aunado a la paleta brillante y a la definición de los personajes, que se caracterizan por una gestualidad marcada, real, explicó Rivera, en tanto responde a un retrato físico y psicológico.

Por medio de estos elementos, Rivera construyó un mecanismo de denuncia a partir de un acontecimiento. Uno de los recursos que el muralista utilizó para provocar el impacto visual fue la violencia con que ejecutó la obra, concentrado en la escena de los niños muertos y mutilados. Diego Rivera era reconocido por pintar la niñez de una manera característica y que inclusive era denominada como “tierna”, entonces ¿porque mostrar una escena tan cruel y violenta?

Esta técnica de representación estuvo dedicada a la reacción, y como se ha explicado, buscaba la exposición de esa realidad “amenazadora”. Un tema político, una composición compleja, un cromatismo extremo, la factura cuidadosa, fueron combinados en la búsqueda de un realismo crítico y experimental. Fue desarrollado a través de la interpretación y síntesis de un acontecimiento concreto, en donde la principal búsqueda fue la claridad de la escena, por medio de una abstracción que creaba una escena realista de un suceso específico y que buscaba una sensación en el receptor de crítica y afectación.

Para concluir podríamos citar las declaraciones de Rivera en torno a la función del mural: “La verdadera pintura mural se produce únicamente bajo el imperativo categórica del deseo y el derecho de un pueblo para expresar, concretándolas en obras de arte, sus luchas, sus penalidades y los medios que necesita para liberarse de éstas y

alcanzar la paz y el bienestar dentro de la suma alegría.”³⁵ Este era el objetivo de *Gloriosa Victoria*, despertar a las masas,³⁶ por medio de métodos que produjeran beneficios a la humanidad, no sólo en términos nacionales, sino en todo el ámbito internacional. A final de cuentas, la obra viajó hacia su destino inicial en Varsovia y fue expuesta. Habría que continuar el análisis sobre su recepción en dicho contexto.

En el caso de *Gloriosa Victoria* el impulso de Rivera volvió a tener un fracaso. En abril de 1955, Antonio Rodríguez describió en el periódico *El Nacional* una reseña dedicada al público mexicano sobre la exposición en Varsovia. Los encabezados fueron: “Silencio alrededor del último cuadro de Rivera” y “El último mural de Diego Rivera, que por su tema de gran actualidad parecía llamado a despertar la atención, ni una sola vez aparece mencionado en la serie de artículos que acabamos de leer.” Habrá que ver y reflexionar los motivos de este silencio. Analizar si en verdad la reacción en Europa Oriental sucedió en esa forma, o si en cambio, fue una especie de estrategia de censura que en esos años tuvo que acostumbrarse a afrontar.

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³⁵ Diego Rivera, “Integración de la arquitectura y de las artes plásticas” en *Diego Rivera. Obras Completas. Textos polémicos, op.cit.*

³⁶ Diego Rivera, “La cuestión del arte” en *Arte y política, op.cit.*, p. 321-337.

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The roads to a late national collection (1950-1982)

This lecture will explore the formation collection at the National Museum of Art (MUNAL) from a nationalist perspective instilled by president Miguel Alemán (1946-1952), whose administration legitimated the image of a prosperous nation in a post-war context. During those years, the State acquired a great deal of Mexican art to be specifically showcased at the National Plastic Arts Museum, which opened in the early 1950s at the Fine Arts Palace and existed only briefly. Three decades later, in 1982, the National Museum of Art opened by presidential decree with the goal of “exhibiting, in a single space, like all great national galleries, the most wide-ranging collection of our most representative art”. As such, the museum sought to display the most significant examples of the “national spirit”, which coincided with the goal of the “first” museum. The collection to be initially exhibited at this new institution was housed in a variety of museums that opened during the 1960s. Works contained in these museums were transferred to this newly opened space that conceived itself as *constitutive*, relying upon a canonical curatorial discourse. My essay will demonstrate the extent of this nationalist model in this collection by alluding to such works belonging to the so-called “Mexican School of Painting”, whose existence is largely dependent upon *official* cultural policies.

Los caminos de una colección nacional tardía (1950-1982)

Dafne Cruz Porchini
Museo Nacional de Arte, México

Este ensayo tratará la conformación de la colección del Museo Nacional de Arte del Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes de México, concebida a partir de un modelo de representación nacionalista y legitimador. En su acepción más histórica, el espacio museístico ha encarnado de diferentes maneras al Estado nacional: se proyecta como instrumento *civilizador*, asumiendo su papel como articulador de la identidad y como guardián de sus “valores artísticos y espirituales”.¹ La creación de un museo nacional en México, a la manera de “las grandes galerías nacionales” nos confirma la existencia de un imaginario social donde “se articulan ideas, ritos y modos de acción”, que aseguran la legitimidad y la razón de ser del poder político.²

Notas sobre la arqueología de un acervo: El Museo Nacional de Artes Plásticas (1947)

El arte no es un hijastro del Estado, sino un buen hijo legítimo

Carlos Chávez, Director del Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes en el discurso inaugural del Museo Nacional de Artes Plásticas, 1947

¹ Luis Gerardo Morales, “En torno a la museología mexicana: la construcción del objetivismo museográfico”, *Curare. Espacio crítico para las artes* 23 (2004): 34-49. Luis Gerardo Morales se remonta a los albores del siglo XIX, destacando que se tomaron como objetos museales las expresiones arqueológicas y “testimonios artísticos”. El Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes fue creado en 1946 y los recintos museísticos más importantes en la ciudad de México se realizaron en la década de los años sesenta.

² La concepción de un museo tiene mucho que ver con los *imaginarios sociales*. Bronislaw Baczko relaciona el término desde el ámbito de las ideas-imagen “inventadas y elaboradas con materiales tomados del caudal simbólico” que tienen un impacto y recepción variable. En el México posrevolucionario, el control y reproducción de representaciones que pretendían incidir sobre el imaginario de buena parte de la sociedad fue una de las estrategias fundamentales para que el Estado asignara un “orden de las cosas” que le permitiera imponerse desde el punto de vista de un *poder legítimo*, que tiene su contrapunto en la “razón de ser” de la comunidad nacional y su influencia sobre las actividades individuales y colectivas Bronislaw Baczko, *Los imaginarios sociales. Memorias y esperanzas colectivas* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 1991), 8.

En septiembre de 1947, fue inaugurado el Museo Nacional de Artes Plásticas en el Palacio de Bellas Artes. Al solemne acto asistieron el Presidente Miguel Alemán, el Secretario de Educación Pública, el Director del recién creado Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, Carlos Chávez, entre otras personalidades. El ejercicio del poder y la autoridad del régimen aquí se vinculan directamente con las políticas y directrices culturales, donde la elite ocupaba un papel de primer orden, creyendo firmemente en la creación de nueva identidad política y el advenimiento de una ciudadanía ejemplar. No fue fortuito: debemos recordar que el periodo alemanista (1946-1952) ha sido considerado como la de mayor desarrollo económico, donde también hubo fortalecimiento industrial y se materializaron varias políticas estatales. En sí mismo, el discurso inaugural del evento realizado por el Director del Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, nos evidencia esta búsqueda constante de legitimación –dentro de los parámetros de la retórica-, donde subyace el “interés” del régimen por “las manifestaciones de la alta cultura”. El funcionario se refirió los esfuerzos casi nulos de las anteriores administraciones por congregar en un solo espacio el arte nacional; Chávez mencionó: “Quiere el Ejecutivo dar una base sólida a la institución. El Museo se crea por Decreto Presidencial, lo que significará, en términos prácticos, estabilidad y respeto...”

Estos términos de la *institucionalidad posrevolucionaria* se habían convertido en condición *sine que non* en la manera de concebir la política y el dirigismo cultural.

Los propósitos y estructura del museo fueron muy claros:

- Concentrar la riqueza pictórica y escultórica de México
- Procurar también allegarse de obras maestras universales
- Presentará la riqueza plástica que posea, en forma viva, a todos los públicos de México, extendiendo en lo posible su acción difusora hacia el exterior.³

³ *Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes. Inauguración del Museo Nacional de Artes Plásticas* (México: INBA, 1947), 11-27. Agradezco a Cristóbal Jácome haberme llamado la atención sobre estas publicaciones.

El nuevo museo abrió sus puertas con una muestra panorámica del arte mexicano, la cual pudo conformarse a partir del resguardo de colecciones institucionales. En la publicación alusiva a este evento, se transcribió íntegro el discurso de Chávez y se ilustró con fotografías de las obras exhibidas. La organización museológica y el recorrido de exhibición se concibieron de la siguiente forma: pintura virreinal, escultura prehispánica (con comodatos del Museo Nacional de Antropología), una pequeña sala dedicada al arte popular, un espacio para exhibir tres obras maestras del arte mexicano, una muestra temporal sobre autorretratos de artistas, un espacio dedicado a Rivera, Orozco y Siqueiros, para terminar con una sala dedicada a José María Velasco y otra al grabador José Guadalupe Posada.⁴ Siendo consecuentes con este proyecto político y cultural nacionalista, se destacaron en particular las obras de Velasco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Diego Rivera y Francisco Goitia, artistas que cuentan con declaratoria de monumento artístico.

Así pues, se siguió una narrativa cronológica misma que sería acorde para sistematizar y explicar –desde la perspectiva de la *institucionalidad*- al arte mexicano, idea canónica y prevaleciente al día de hoy. Los discursos curatoriales fueron articulados de manera compacta y lineal, sin hacer alusión alguna a disidencias o quiebres históricos, recreando una “sintaxis de los eventos que supuestamente formaron la nación mexicana, que los ciudadanos, o su gobierno, decidieron mostrar como patrimonio artístico”.⁵

Las fotografías que acompañan esta publicación operan como la confirmación y escenario visual de la legitimidad. Un interesado Presidente Alemán aparece explicando las obras del recorrido a Chávez, al Secretario de Educación y a Fernando Gamboa, primer director de

⁴ En gran medida, así sería instrumentado en el Museo Nacional de Arte -35 años más tarde-, incluso con estas mismas obras.

⁵ Carlos Molina, “Fernando Gamboa y su particular versión de México”, *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 87 (2005): 120.

museo. En otra imagen, estudiantes de secundaria admiraban el mural de Rivera *El hombre en el cruce de caminos*, guiados por una profesora; mientras que en otras ilustraciones se detallan visualmente las actividades propias del recinto, como el montaje y preparación museográfica de alguna exhibición.

De manera paralela a la apertura de este museo, el Estado se dio a la tarea de adquirir un lote significativo de obras artísticas mexicanas, especialmente de los artistas “vivos”. La hegemonía compartida y establecida por el propio régimen y los llamados “Tres Grandes”, marcaron que la tendencia artística a seguir. Se pensaba que el realismo era hasta cierto punto efectivo en la transmisión de la construcción de la identidad nacional y debía ser privilegiado en los programas de adquisición de los museos, por lo que la corriente abstracta fue considerada una “forma burguesa de arte”.⁶

La aportación de este museo fue el intento por regular los procesos de trabajo en cuanto a sus acervos, al tiempo de concentrar en un solo lugar las colecciones nacionales de pintura localizadas en las galerías de la Academia de San Carlos. Otra estrategia fue la realización de una campaña de donaciones de obra al recién creado museo, donde un grupo de banqueros contribuyó de manera notable la iniciativa cultural federal, demostrándose una relación clientelar entre empresarios, políticos y el propio régimen.⁷

La manera en que el Estado concebía el arte y la cultura debe ser reflejada en la creación de este museo como el antecedente directo del Museo Nacional de Arte. Chávez reflexionó:

...las manifestaciones artísticas de todos los órdenes constituyen la expresión más sincera y vigorosa del espíritu nacional.. El Estado debe atender, por su trascendencia evidente, la acción que el arte, en todas sus formas, es capaz de ejercer en la consolidación de la *mexicanidad*...⁸

⁶ James Oles, “El peso del realismo. Notas curatoriales” (México: Museo de Arte Moderno, 2008). 7.

⁷ Stephen R. Niblo, *México en los cuarenta. Modernidad y corrupción* (México: Océano, 2008).

⁸ *Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes. Inauguración del Museo Nacional de Artes Plásticas* (México: INBA, 1947):23. El papel de Gamboa fue central en la creación de museos y exposiciones internacionales. El

De esta manera, la administración del presidente Miguel Alemán a través de diversas prácticas culturales, construyó la imagen de un país desarrollado y civilizado en una etapa de posguerra. Fernando Gamboa, pintor, promotor cultural, museógrafo y diplomático, estuvo estrechamente vinculado a la cúpula oficial desde el inicio de la década de los años treinta, Gamboa fue considerado el “agente cultural” por excelencia con el que contaron los gobiernos de la posrevolución, especialmente el alemanista.

Al ser uno de los artífices más importantes de las políticas culturales en México, Gamboa decidió que lo mejor también era realizar exposiciones internacionales con la finalidad de difundir el arte mexicano bajo la postura reduccionista de expresar los “valores universales” vinculados con “expresión mexicana”. Gamboa se consolidó como el más importante organizador de exposiciones de arte mexicano y extranjero. A las muestras orquestadas por Gamboa, siempre de la época prehispánica hasta la década de los años cincuenta, se añade la estratégica disposición museográfica de los objetos, logrando consolidar una imagen “prototípica” del México moderno, estrechamente emparentada con la ideología sostenida - por lo menos en el discurso-, por las administraciones gubernamentales en turno.⁹

Desde el ámbito cultural, Gamboa y otros funcionarios contribuyeron a una estrategia política que sustentó al Estado desde el ámbito cultural, y donde la legitimidad en muy

discurso leído por Chávez aparece transcrito y con sus propias anotaciones en archivo de Gamboa, por lo que podemos decir que con toda probabilidad este discurso fue redactado por él mismo.

⁹ Su desempeño como agente cultural se consolidó además a través de varios cargos institucionales de especial relevancia, entre los que se cuentan la dirección de la Sala Nacional del Palacio de Bellas Artes entre 1941 y 1945 y, entre 1947 y 1953 la jefatura del Departamento de Artes Plásticas y la dirección del Museo Nacional de Artes Plásticas del recientemente creado INBA. Esta institución, de la cual fue miembro fundador, lo nombró su Subdirector General durante el periodo 1949-1952. Gracias a un proyecto de investigación dedicado a Fernando Gamboa dirigido por Ana Garduño y del cual formé parte, tuvimos la oportunidad de consultar su archivo “público”, que alguna manera se convierte en el reflejo de *cómo quería ser visto* este funcionario.

buena medida descansó en esta definición de lo “mexicano”; que, como ya mencionamos, constituye hasta hoy una imagen del país tanto local como internacional.

Al cerrar el Museo casi cinco años después -seguramente por cuestiones presupuestales-, los dirigentes culturales optaron por la realización de exposiciones internacionales de arte mexicano con el cuerpo de la nueva colección existente a lo que añadieron las adquisiciones del recién creado instituto. En una época boyante de compra, fueron tomadas en cuenta las obras que en buena medida tuvieran un carácter ideológico neutral. De igual manera, Gamboa se adaptó a las circunstancias al reorientar estratégicamente la obra de las generaciones más jóvenes de creadores, conservando al mismo tiempo la idea ya simbólica de una continuidad cultural.

Con piezas sustanciales del arte nacional, los guiones contenidos en las muestras internacionales manejaron un punto de vista unificado y homogeneizador, al tiempo de reforzar la idea de “mexicanidad”. Con el objetivo de promover y difundir la cultura mexicana, estos eventos siempre contaron con el aval de diversas instancias del régimen, puesto que el eje rector también fue cumplir con una función diplomática.

Para la primera exposición de arte mexicano en París de 1952, el propio Gamboa –quien contó con la anuencia del gobierno mexicano-, legitimó la división cronológica del arte mexicano, bajo la égida de la “universalidad”, con el objetivo de tomar “conciencia de lo mexicano como ejemplo de expresión artística aparte y descubrimiento de la línea invisible que une lo precortésiano, lo novohispano, con el arte de hoy y el folklore”.¹⁰ Así, Gamboa participó activamente en esta construcción visual de mitos y cánones que no han perdido su

¹⁰ Archivo de la Promotora Cultural Fernando Gamboa A.C., “Seis años del Departamento de Artes Plásticas del INBA”, mecanoscrito, FG-APlast.II/224 y ss.

vigencia, como el de la representación idealizada de la figura indígena, por solo citar un ejemplo.

Un nuevo museo en otro Palacio (1982)

En la entronización del museo como templo, los discursos “de selección de obra” tratan de explicar ciertas categorías históricas y la herencia común del pasado se hace *idea* presente; elaborándose un ritual ciudadano que giran en torno a los objetos exhibidos. Este paradigma/modelo de museo corresponde también a una serie de demostraciones amplias del compromiso con el principio ilustrado de igualdad y de búsqueda identitaria.¹¹

Tal como señala Carol Duncan, el levantamiento de museos y sus repositorios obedecen a los propósitos políticos que desean perpetuar esa memoria a través de estos “monumentos”. En este sentido, el artefacto cultural –incluso arquitectónico–, donde los objetos son desplegados, se convierte en metáfora de un lugar de contemplación que en sí mismo impone cierto respeto y propicia la ritualidad.¹² En este orden, el museo ante los ojos de la comunidad tiene una narrativa programada que impone el concepto de identidad desde el poder.

Tres décadas después de la apertura y cierre del Museo Nacional de Artes Plásticas, se estableció por decreto presidencial el Museo Nacional de Arte (MUNAL). El edificio elegido fue la antigua Secretaría de Comunicaciones, edificio neorrenacentista construido a principios del siglo XX como parte del proyecto modernizador de Porfirio Díaz. Hubo un

¹¹ Carol Duncan, “Art museums and the ritual of citizenship”. en *Exhibiting cultures. The poetics and politics of museum display* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1990), 94. Francis Haskell, *El museo efímero. Los maestros antiguos y el auge de las exposiciones artísticas* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2000).

¹² *Ibid.*

gesto simbólico en la apropiación del inmueble y que también tiene que ver con la construcción de la legitimidad. El edificio de alguna forma era el signo de una época de “dictadura”, que fue derrumbada gracias a la Revolución Mexicana. Con el advenimiento de una clase política posrevolucionaria, se daba paso a la regulación del nuevo orden. No debemos olvidar también que el inmueble pudo convertirse en museo gracias a la intervención de Pedro Ramírez Vázquez, considerado el arquitecto del régimen, mismo que configuró el estatus entre la arquitectura y el poder tal como lo conocemos ahora.¹³ Así, las colecciones pertenecientes a la nación, se concentrarían en un solo lugar con la finalidad de compartirlas con los ciudadanos para su “goce estético”.

El “Museo Nacional de Pintura” -primer nombre dado al MUNAL-, fue creado en el peor año de una de las crisis económicas más graves del país. El decreto del Presidente José López Portillo –probablemente animado por su esposa, peculiar promotora de las artes-, tuvo como tarea primordial “...difundir las artes por todos los medios posibles, hacia el público en general y en especial hacia las *clases populares y los escolares*”, según dicta la ley de creación fechada en junio de 1982. Aquí lo cuestionable es precisamente esta noción de “pueblo”, y que seguía siendo utilizada con el mismo énfasis retórico que en la década de los años veinte. El uso político del museo parece explicarse por el interés cultural de la elite: a pesar de la devaluación del peso, la cultura y el arte tenían cabida para reforzar la identidad y la unidad de los habitantes del país. En este sentido, la fundación del MUNAL es un gesto que pretende devolver al régimen una evidencia de *virtud política*.

¹³ Pedro Ramírez Vázquez fue Presidente del Comité Organizador de los Juegos Olímpicos de México 1968. En el periodo de López Portillo ocupó el puesto de Secretario de Asentamientos Humanos y Obras Públicas. Sus obras más emblemáticas son el Estadio Azteca, la Basílica de Guadalupe, el Palacio Legislativo, el Museo de Antropología y el Museo de Arte Moderno.

Continuaba el decreto:

... se hace necesario contar con un museo que reúna, conserve y difunda obras de significación e importancia... que es necesario fomentar en la población el gusto e interés por las artes y apoyar la conservación, exhibición y divulgación de la obra artística de autores y temas mexicanos, como medio para *fortalecer la identidad nacional*.¹⁴

También al Museo Nacional de Arte se le asignó su permanencia como una institución no lucrativa, al servicio de la sociedad, para reunir, conservar y difundir el arte mexicano. Así, el MUNAL se convirtió en el *museo de Museos*: en esta instancia debían centralizarse no únicamente las expresiones artísticas de la creación, sino que también su normatividad y su modelo de desarrollo debían ser tomados en cuenta para otras instituciones museísticas.

La consigna institucional prevaleciente, fue “exhibir en un solo espacio, a la manera de las *grandes galerías nacionales, lo que nos representa como país* al tiempo de ofrecer una panorámica del arte mexicano”, decidiéndose así concentrar las obras significativas del “espíritu nacional”, que casualmente fue el mismo mandato de su antecedente más inmediato.

La colección con el que debía abrir este nuevo museo estaba repartida o resguardada en varios museos que habían sido abiertos en la década de los años sesenta, como el Museo de Arte Moderno. No obstante, se estipuló que las obras de la Academia de San Carlos y otras piezas propiedad del INBA, como la Pinacoteca Virreinal, debían pasar *ipso facto* al recién inaugurado museo, denominándosele como acervo *constitutivo*. A lo largo de dos décadas, el MUNAL engrosó su colección gracias a una serie de estrategias de donación, adjudicación, comodatos a largo plazo y en último lugar de adquisición de obra. Cabe mencionar que en los inicios del MUNAL se pensó en la exhibición de piezas precolombinas para este *resumen* del arte mexicano y se solicitaron algunos comodatos

¹⁴ *Diario Oficial de la Federación*, 18 de junio, 1982: 102. El subrayado es mío.

pero se devolvieron poco tiempo después por no formar parte de una vocación que iba puliéndose cada día.

Las líneas de exhibición fueron establecidas de manera contundente: “coleccionar, conservar, comunicar, exhibir y difundir el arte mexicano desde el siglo XVI hasta la década de los cincuenta de la pasada centuria, con énfasis en el periodo comprendido entre la fundación de la Academia de San Carlos y la culminación de la llamada Escuela Mexicana de Pintura”; integrándose así un discurso curatorial que siguió un canon narrativo y cronológico: arte virreinal, arte decimonónico y arte moderno, recorrido que ha encontrado ya varios cuestionamientos de orden historiográfico.

En primera instancia, el discurso museológico del MUNAL tenía como propósito “privilegiar la figuración”, donde incluso las muestras del arte no figurativo son puestas como “estrategias alternas”; mismas que nos confirman que dentro de la visión nacionalista de la creación del MUNAL, el arte abstracto mexicano –nutrido con gran fuerza por la lectura de autores internacionales-, no podían insertarse dentro de este paradigma de *museo de museos*. Desde los inicios de la conformación constitutiva de su acervo, prácticamente la abstracción fue borrada,¹⁵ en pro de una narrativa sobre la identidad nacional.

El Secretario de Educación Pública declaró sin ambages: “Este museo aspira a ser un *resumen* dinámico de nuestro patrimonio cultural, en su expresión artística. Mostrará nuestro pasado y revelará nuestra identidad como evidencia de lo que somos en el presente y anuncio de lo que podemos ser en el futuro”.¹⁶ Esta visión un tanto canónica del arte mexicano fue objeto de revisiones y planteamientos a partir la reapertura del museo en el

¹⁵ James Oles, “Bárbaros en el templo: el arte contemporáneo en el MUNAL”, en *La invención de lo cotidiano* (México: Fundación/Colección Jumex-Museo Nacional de Arte, 2008), 67.

¹⁶ *Museo Nacional de Arte* (México, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes-Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1982), 6. Discurso de Fernando Solana, Secretario de Educación Pública.

año 2000,¹⁷ –el cual estuvo cerrado por un año por una gran remodelación importante- que trajo consigo reconsideraciones museológicas y curatoriales, de las cuales aún falta mucho por hacer.¹⁸ Estas nociones homogeneizantes de la cultura, han construido una historia mítica fundacional sustentada en la continuidad de los valores plásticos del arte mexicano que funcionan más como corolario de la política oficial.

La invención de “La invención”

La colección tardía del MUNAL ha tenido la intención de trascender hacia el ámbito del arte contemporáneo, lo cual no ha sido tarea nada fácil.

A partir de una serie de exposiciones monográficas -y también en sus salas hipertextuales-, el museo ha podido acercarse e incursionar en expresiones artísticas más actuales, como “experimentos” que adoptan la “práctica contemporánea y la no contemporánea”.¹⁹ Con la reinauguración del museo en el año 2000, se estipuló que la vocación del museo debía encontrar cierta “resonancia” en el arte contemporáneo, pero sin intentar todavía un “diálogo” con el acervo. Por alrededor de tres años, se llevaron a cabo exhibiciones con las colecciones de arte contemporáneo de la corporación Femsa y Televisa.

Quizás el MUNAL no estaba preparado todavía para albergar a una colección “global periférica”,²⁰ como es la de Fundación/Colección Jumex. A finales del año 2008 se presentó en las Salas de Colecciones Temporales la muestra *La invención de lo cotidiano*,

¹⁷ El plan museológico y museográfico se detalla en *Memoria MUNAL 2000* (México, Museo Nacional de Arte-Patronato del Museo Nacional de Arte, 2001). Se argumenta el sentido de compromiso de la institución, mediando “el conocimiento, comunicación e interpretación del arte mexicano con el propósito de estimular el aprendizaje significativo y goce estético de sus visitantes”.

¹⁸ Una de las fortalezas del MUNAL es su Patronato, quien ha apoyado de manera sustancial los distintos programas para ponerlos a la altura de los espacios museísticos de primer mundo.

¹⁹ James Oles, “Bárbaros en el templo: el arte contemporáneo en el MUNAL”, en *La invención de lo cotidiano* (México: Fundación/Colección Jumex-Museo Nacional de Arte, 2008), 70.

²⁰ Cuauhtémoc Medina, “Arte colonial contemporáneo”, *Reforma*,

basada en el título de la obra del historiador francés Michel de Certeau, con la finalidad de entablar un diálogo entre dos acervos bajo la premisa de “la ciencia de lo singular”.

En primer lugar vemos que son dos colecciones atípicas en esta manera de relacionarse. Una colección institucional y ortodoxa, que agrupa cinco siglos de arte e historia. La otra colección es componente de un grupo corporativo y ha correspondido al gusto de un coleccionista en un momento cultural muy específico. El curador –o creador del concepto curatorial- fue Frédéric Bonnet, quien tomó como hilo conductor los temas de la vida cotidiana, así como sus mecánicas y resistencias.

Para muchos el experimento curatorial fue arriesgado, y para otros en cambio, fue reformador y atinado. No obstante, este ejercicio nos funciona para poner a discusión los caminos de este acervo así como su proyección. Uno de los puntos más polémicos fue la disposición del *marketing* y la búsqueda de públicos a favor de un diálogo un tanto forzado -y sin mayor complejidad-, entre dos maneras de coleccionar y preservar. De alguna manera, el MUNAL respondió a la necesidad de ubicar a la institución en un devenir internacional de acuerdo con las estrategias de mercado y correspondiendo a una emergente por buscar -y entablar- una relación *sin más* con el arte actual.

Las imágenes de las masas de Andreas Gursky se homologan con los agentes trabajadores de Francisco Eppens y Ramón Alva de la Canal; una fotografía de Gabriel Orozco se enfrenta a paisajes de Eugenio Landesio o José María Velasco, la serie fotográfica de Rineke Dijkstra encuentra un contacto visual con la autobiografía pintada de Ramón Cano Manilla; o una obra de Estrada –el retrato de un niño muerto-, intenta vincularse con una fotografía de Doug Aitken titulada *Shopping cart*.

Ciertamente, todas estas imágenes no tienen que ver. En su columna de crítica de arte, Cuauhtémoc Medina se refirió a la muestra como una “falacia acrítica”, donde incluso la

obra de Certeau no tuvo “la más mínima simulación de movilizar sus categorías artísticas”. Tiene razón cuando indica que donde “al prestigiar el arte de hoy lo hemos convertido en el vehículo ordinario del prestigio”.

Los retos hacia el futuro

El historiador y crítico de arte James Oles ha escrito algunos textos con la tendencia e influjo de las instituciones museísticas en el país, como un diagnóstico actual de las colecciones desde el punto de vista curatorial. La conformación de una colección tardía lanza una reflexión sobre su futuro. ¿El acervo del Museo Nacional de Arte realmente puede abrirse frente a otras colecciones con un diálogo claro y real? ¿Se debe estudiar y conocer desde el punto de vista académico su colección al tiempo de fortalecer sus discursos curatoriales, mediante relecturas innovadoras con especialistas invitados? ¿Se puede comenzar a implementar el binomio curatorial *senior-junior* para profesionalizar los procesos de exhibición y estudios de la colección? Esto es más que un *wishful thinking*: se trata de tener una necesaria y sana distancia con el nacionalismo a ultranza y de las visiones burocráticas.

El templo-museo debe ser visto como un lugar para la confrontación, la experimentación y el debate. Dentro de los compromisos que debe asumir -y aquí coincido con Oles-, el museo no puede evadirse de “la continua necesidad de proyectos de investigación histórica más firmes y académicos”.²¹

²¹ Oles, James Oles, “Bárbaros en el templo: el arte contemporáneo en el MUNAL”, en *La invención de lo cotidiano* (México: Fundación/Colección Jumex-Museo Nacional de Arte, 2008), 70.

Las estrategias y prácticas curatoriales se conciben a partir de privilegiar un “objeto”, exhibir un “contexto”, y/o una forma de representación o justificar ciertas narrativas.²² De acuerdo con Svetlana Alpers, finalmente al museo le corresponde esa organización de categorías: definir *qué quiere que veamos* dentro de *ese* discurso monográfico o cronológico, lo que determina también en un recorrido lineal, la implementación museográfica e incluso en el cedulario.²³

El camino al futuro parece intrincado. Es momento de ejercer la autocrítica y comenzar a renovar –de una manera sensata inteligente- esta colección tardía institucional, que aún tiene la capacidad para forjar nuevas ideas y rejuvenecer las existentes.

²² Véase Steven D. Lavine e Ivan Karp, “Introduction: Museums and Multiculturalism”, *Exhibiting cultures. The poetics and politics of museum display*, Washington, Smithsonian Institution, 1990, p. 4.

²³ Svetlana Alpers, “A way of seeing”, en *Exhibiting cultures*, p. 28.

BIO

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Melissa Geppert

Cannibalizing the Favela:
Cannibal Legacies and the Politics of Collaboration in Dias and
Riedweg's 'FunkStaden'

This paper considers the ways in which Brazil's unincorporated slums, or *favelas*, are incorporated into the space of contemporary art. It also considers the disparate histories and discourses through which the favela has itself become a site for art and how this recent framing of urban poverty relates to notions such as 'community', 'collaboration', and 'empowerment' that have gained currency in contemporary global marketplaces of art that extend beyond the traditional institutions of the museum or gallery (though these are of course still important) to include state and municipal institutions for urban development, supranational corporations, international cultural foundations, transnational Non Governmental Organizations, and grassroots social welfare groups. In an attempt to map such a complex matrix of institutional supports, historical lineages, and current artistic efforts, I look at the collaborative project *Funk Staden*, created by Brazilian artist Mauricio Dias and Swiss-German artist Walter Riedweg for the *Documenta 12* international arts festival in Kassel Germany during the summer of 2007. As I will explain further, the piece is centered on the artist's collaboration with favela youths associated with the *Baile Funk* music and dance culture of Rio de Janeiro. While in many respects adhering to familiar models of collaborative art that solicit the participation of local community groups, Dias and Riedweg mediate their encounter with the Carioca *funkeiros* through illustrations of Hans Staden's 1557 account of the alleged cannibalism of Brazil's indigenous Tupinamba tribes. I suggest that the convergence of these two historically disparate subjects in *Funk Staden* disrupts the conventions through which the favelas have continually

emerged in contemporary collaborative art and opens onto considerations of the economy, symbolic and material, of the favela as it reframed by current artistic practices and expanded institutional networks. This paper, therefore, analyses the organization of the piece so as to trace the way in which the favela gains visibility through art before an increasingly global audience as well as the relations of power that condition and enliven such representations.

In 2006, Dias and Riedweg were the only artists commissioned by *Documenta 12* co-curators Roger Bruegel and Ruth Novak to produce new work for the exhibition. The artists were provided with three loose thematic frameworks that the curators used to organize the other pre-existing works selected for display. The theme of Modernity was first posed as global phenomena in the design of the exhibition by incorporating artworks from a wide range of periods and locations, ranging from 13th century to the present. Second, the theme of Bare Life was selected as a nod to Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben who coined the term to describe the exteriorities and exclusions of modernity that he argues are paradigmatic of our contemporary political condition. This theme, though ambiguous within the exhibition design, seemed to be expressed through works dealing with explicit political crisis ranging from Lagos to the West Bank to the Brazilian slums. A final motif-as-question, “What is to be done?”, was ostensibly posed in order to direct audiences towards a new horizon of human creation made possible by the conditions of the first two themes.¹

At the time of the commission, Dias and Riedweg were living in Rio de Janeiro developing new work centered on the dynamic musical subculture of *Baile Funk*, a predominantly Afro-Brazilian genre performed at large-scale balls in the city’s favelas that eschews the famous conviviality characteristic of samba in favor of explicit and often violent political critiques (Yudice, Sansone). As a result of the commission, the artists redirected their

¹ For further contextualization of the exhibition, see catalogues by Taschen and Schöllhammer.

preliminary work on Carioca Funk in order to adapt it to the themes of the show, the context of the exhibition space, as well as the more general conditions specific to the once-every-five-year exhibition in Kassel. The artists learned that Kassel Germany was the birthplace of Hans Staden, a mercenary who worked aboard Portuguese ships to the Americas in the sixteenth century who was taken captive by one of Brazil's indigenous Tupinamba tribes. Staden assumed legendary status when, upon his release, he returned to Europe and produced one of the first published accounts of the New World in 1557. Staden's graphic account of Tupi rituals, most notably their alleged practices of ritual cannibalism, laid the foundations for what would develop into a highly citational European discourse of the New World in which the indigenous cannibal was the privileged signifier of native savagery and thus unendingly cited in order to legitimize Europe's colonial project. The crude and unauthored illustrations that accompanied Staden's text served as the template for countless other New World ethnographic narratives so as to solidify the cannibal as the premiere icon of the Americas.

Staden's significance to the imaging of Brazil made the coincidence of his birthplace with *Documenta* fortuitous for Dias and Riedweg. The artists thus merged their interests in Carioca Funk culture with Staden's text in order to bridge the two projects and reasonably justify the Funk project within the context of the exhibition. The artists capitalized on their acquaintance with a local funk DJ in Rio to gain permission to film within the clubs and audition participants for the project. The artists selected a small cast of young men and women to reenact five key illustrations of the Tupi's anthropophagite rituals from Staden's text (Dias and Riedweg, interview). Both Dias and Riedweg and their youth collaborators choreographed the enactments of Staden's text around a series of video cameras that both structured and documented the performance. On the roofs of their makeshift homes and against a panoramic view of the city,

the young funkeiros reproduced the scenes of a victim's seduction, murder, and consumption at the hands of his Tupi captors. While the majority of the video footage was shot by the artists who remained off-screen so as to approximate the compositions of Staden's illustrations, the dancers also carried three video cameras that were attached to the tops of kitsch replicas of the *iberapema*, the ritual club used by the Tupinamba to deal their victims the final blow and a prominent feature of New World iconography. The clubs/cameras were passed and spun around between dancers, creating a dizzying and unfocused secondary document of their performance. Dias and Riedweg included additional footage shot within a funk ball, again using the spinning club/camera device. Finally, the artists incorporated footage of Staden's original book that they filmed in a German archive.

The final piece was arranged as a three-screen triptych on which footage of the dancers, book, and funk ball was both juxtaposed between screens and layered together within the individual frames. A soundtrack of Baile Funk music was played at blaring decibels that overpowered its small viewing room and echoed throughout the otherwise quiet galleries of the Schloss Wilhelmshöhe museum. Throughout the video, an anonymous hand is shown flipping through the pages of Staden's book as its illustrations "come to life" through an initial overlay of the dancers onto the drawings and, finally, to a complete fade transition from the drawings to the live performances. Sporadic footage of the funk balls shot from the spinning camera/club is woven into the rhythm of the illustrations-to-performance sequences that play out at varying intervals across the three screens. The performances are predictably over-exaggerated and somewhat unfocused. At times, the dancers seem to relish in the irony of their performance, wildly jumping over small fires burning in tin cans, carelessly tossing around a plaster mannequin used as a stand-in for the victim, crudely enacting sexual encounters, all the while

exchanging wry glances.² At other points, they appear obviously bored as they half-heartedly gyrate to the music and spin the awkward camera/club. Often times, the brief moment prior to the funkeiros jumping into action at the obvious off-screen command of the artists remains in the final editing. In short, there is little care given to concealing the artificiality of the production, the artists clear hand in the performances, and the highly contrived nature of the dancer's participation in the work.

In *Funk Staden*, Dias and Riedweg's young collaborators bring together the unlikely juxtaposition of Brazil's most widely popularized subjects of representation from either side of the modern period; the cannibal marks the emergence of the Americas into the symbolic and material economies of Western modernity as its outermost limit while the *favelado* invokes the persistence of the non-modern within the modern Brazilian state, to more or less violent effect. Indeed, the question of effects looms large in the project: what is gained when the participants enact this script and thereby become stand-ins for both Staden's Tupis and a generalized condition of social exclusion (bare life) which marks their communities? If the project offers a formal palimpsest of modernity's exclusions, to what end do the artists, like Staden, make otherness visible?

Indeed, contemporary attempts to transform marginal cultural practices like those of the Carioca funkeiros into opportunities for aesthetic or critical reflection are not without tensions, made all the more difficult to resolve due to the migration of such works from the specific communities engaged in the work to the international circuits of arts biennials and festivals. Miwon Kwon has referred to this predicament as the 'un-siting' of site-specific art that occurs when local sites, practices, and histories are mined for their 'reality' and subsequently processed

² Here, I am reminded of the coy nods to the camera given by the Mangueira residents who participated in Hélio Oiticica's *Parangolés* in nearly all photographic documentation of those works and believe that they are also important reference points for Dias and Riedweg.

by artists for the new contexts of their display throughout the globe (138-155). Within the past two decades, a proliferation of site-specific collaborations between artists and community groups have resulted in nearly as many critical attempts to analyze the significance of such work. Though too varied to rehearse in depth here, debates surrounding site-specific collaboration range from laudatory to cynical, alternately celebrating the increased democratization of the artistic process brought about through the inclusion of historically underrepresented groups or critiquing the ways in which artists assume paternalistic, ethnographic, managerial, or outright exploitative relationships with the communities they seek to engage. The analytical difficulties posed by such ‘un-sitings’ and multiple ‘re-sitings’ of site-specific, community-based work has largely been met with critical endeavors to identify an “artist as” model that can be used to describe the various merits or limitations within a given artist’s collaborative methods. Within these critical models, collaborative artists have been cast as activists, ethnographers, service providers, historians, delegates, and evangelists to name but a few.³

It is possible to Dias and Riedweg’s practice into any or all of these roles. As activists, they seek to confront the hysteria and racism that informs most mainstream representations of the favelas through involving favela youth in the co-production of the work. As ethnographers, they stage ‘encounters’ with local communities. As deconstructive historians, they work to link representations from Brazil’s past to their contemporary avatars in the slums. As service providers or potential evangelists, they are cast as the new protagonists of engaged contemporary art whose enemies are not the institutions of art, as with their conceptualist predecessors, but rather a global order marked by abject poverty, genocide, violent territorial disputes, and social marginalization of all kinds. Within the latter paradigm, artists are believed to provide refuge to

³ See Foster, Godfry, Fraser, Kester, Kwon, and Jacobs for a sampling of a few influential accounts.

communities in distress in the form of collaborative projects that serve as coping devices and a tools of empowerment, giving voice to those otherwise unable to speak before a global audience.

The “artist as” model is not without its own citational force and continually isolates the collaborative artist his or herself as the sole agent in the packaging of marginal identities and practices for elite arts audiences. While the form or intention might vary from project to project, it is the artist who remains the sole focus of such criticism, an ironic endgame since it is often the very authority of the artist that collaborative art seeks to unsettle. What tends to fall out of the “artist as” model, however, is the expanded cultural economy that wrests value in the form of cultural capital from both collaborative artists and their community-participants. For example, Dias and Riedweg were selected for the sole commission of *Documenta 12* with the themes of show chosen in advance. Breugal and Novak’s focus on the exclusions of modernity as understood through the concept of Bare Life thus framed their selection of the artists, whose work is routinely framed in terms of its engagement with ‘otherness’, ‘marginality’, or ‘subalternity’. Indeed, Dias and Riedweg’s career has been shaped by this new economy of collaborative arts since they began co-producing projects in 1993, collaborating with neighborhood organizations, social workers, NGOs, UNESCO, local politicians and community elites, heritage foundations, as well as curators of international exhibitions, their corporate sponsors, and ‘marginal’ communities across multiple centers of the developing world.

While the projects of Dias and Riedweg are typically discussed in terms of the ‘open ended’ collaborations that they initiate with selected ‘outsider’ groups, it is significant that the performances in *Funk Staden* are actually quite ‘closed’ and are instead predicated on both Staden’s text as well as specific aesthetic and cinematic traditions. Here, I want to suggest that *FunkStaden* metaphorizes the transformation of the favela from the “unmappable exterior” of

early ethnographic discourse to the “Bare Life” of the biennial circuit through rehearsing, and ultimately undermining, the techniques centripetal to a certain type ethnographic film that has important overlaps with collaborative art: direct cinema. Popularized by social documentaries in the 1960s, direct cinema was thought to offer a non-invasive technique for documenting communities in a way that did not sacrifice the subject being filmed to directorial bias. Therefore, the movement introduced a style that attempted to remove all filters imposed by the director, including montage sequences, fictional dramatization, and voice-over narration. I believe that it is not happenstance that Dias and Riedweg picked this model of documentary film to structure their collaborations for *Funk Staden*. On the contrary, this mode of filmic representation has long informed socially-minded Brazilian cinema and provided the conceptual underpinnings in the field of documentary film. In Jean Claude Bernardet’s *Cineastas e Imagens do Povo* [Filmmakers and Images of the People] (1995), the most extensive study of the history of documentary filmmaking in Brazil, the author identifies this mode as the central strategy of Brazilian documentary. To quote: “The thing about our cinema that makes it different from documentary anywhere else lies in the fact that the misery we suffer knows no equivalent. What the documentaries of Eduardo Coutinho [director of *Boca de lixo*] and others have shown is that the suffering of Brazil can speak for itself” (244). Imposing a mimetic link between the reality of Brazilian suffering and the mode of representation that denies the presence of the film apparatus, he takes Glauber Rocha’s famous description of Brazilian film as “um estetica da fome” (an “aesthetic of hunger”) to collapse the aesthetics of filmmaking into the experience of hunger. Hence, he is claiming that the subject only demands a cinematic form able to let it represent itself with the least amount of intrusion.

However, as many critics have suggested, there is never a way to get rid of directorial bias and, as Jay Ruby has argued, “the empowerment of the film’s subject is therefore more illusory than actual” (203). As Ruby notes, direct cinema depends on a separation between the subjects being filmed and the subject filming (i.e. the director) to create the illusion that the subjects are being filmed “in their natural environment”. Dias and Riedweg seem to be echoing this sentiment, suggesting that direct cinema is not exactly the opaque representational strategy that its proponents claim. Throughout *Funk Staden*, the footage alternates between images taken by Dias and Riedweg and images taken by the funkeiros with their own cameras. The result is a supposedly reflex moment where the images of the filmed subjects are interrupted by images of the subjects actually “shooting back”, creating the impression that the directors are breaking down their own authorial control. By including the agency of the participants in their own documentation, these sequences seem to suggest that “the subjects are directors too”, a sentiment not too far from that proffered by proponents of collaborative projects ranging from documentary filmmaking to participant ethnography to community-based art.

Funk Staden relies in part on strategies that alternately invoke direct cinema (in the footage of the filmed subjects) and corrode the ‘invisibility’ of the director so important to its pretence of capturing an unmediated reality (in the footage taken by the funkeiros themselves). On their own, the simultaneous screenings of the Baile footage from both angles of direct cinema might be seen together as a sort of free-for-all for the spectator, letting he or she “take what they want” from the multiple screens, seeing that no single directing force is in control, that both director and directed are implicated. However, and this seems to me to be crucial, Dias and Riedweg break up the two types of documentary footage through interrupting them with superimposed images from Staden’s text. This formal manipulation unites the diegetic material

on all three screens together and provides a critical link that moves the piece beyond the relativity of a formally progressive yet ultimately banal statement such as “we are all subject to the camera” or “there is no one director or artist”.

Antropofagia, first chronicled by Staden for his European readers, also of course represents one of the central tropes used in Brazilian art to describe the way its economic and artistic culture has been eaten up and re-digested in the geopolitical ordering of the world. The superimposition of Staden’s Tupis therefore casts both of the film strategies as well as the larger collaborative project itself in a much different light, making the powerful claim that they are both filtered through the way Brazilian culture has to be re-interpreted for a larger cultural market. As antropofagia represents a co-habitation of the primitive and the modern in the same historical moment, it refers to the tension that anthropologist Roberto Da Matta correctly identifies as the “primal scene” in the formation of Brazilian national identity (97). Even a cursory reading of Brazilian aesthetics points to the centrality of Staden’s text, which was originally appropriated in Brazilian Modernist poetry of the 1920s (by writers like Oswald de Andrade, Mario de Andrade, and Raul Bopp) to describe the re-appropriation of European artistic influences by Brazilian artists. However, it quickly became popularized as a metaphor for the positioning of Brazil in the larger economic system (Mandureira 21-85). Following Oswald de Andrade, the key proponent of Brazilian *Antropofagite* movement, the Brazilian modernist-as-cannibal would need to reclaim the savagery of his cannibal ancestry, not to depict a romanticized pre-colonial past, but rather to combat European cultural imperialism through ingesting its techniques, and technologies in order to foster a specifically Brazilian modernism that could enter the international marketplace on its own terms. For Andrade and others, the ultimate goal of Brazilian art is to move itself from the global market’s “desert table” to a “main course” and create, as he writes, “a counter-formation

of gastronomy”. Dias and Riedweg seem to take this claim to its perverse conclusion, arguing that the only way for Brazil to offer something appealing for the dinner table of global art is to digest its own position of alterity. In other words, the funkeiros only empower themselves to be devoured again by the biennial circuit.

Juxtaposing the images from both types of documentary footage with Staden’s superimposed text casts a new light on debates surrounding collaborative art as well as claims about the necessity of documentary form for “representing” Brazilian subjects. Putting these modes through the anthropophagic machine accomplishes a powerful conceptual critique. They are not merely giving the cameras back to the film subjects. Instead, they are showing how many forms of documentary and collaborative practices meant to “empower” marginal subjects are actually linked to a much deeper phenomena in Brazilian social history than merely the representation of suffering, oppression, or, in this instance, *Bare Life*. Through incorporating anthropophagia as the overriding link between all forms of filmic representation, they suggest that these representations must cannibalize themselves (they must literally turn themselves into consumable objects) for expanded global markets. In this way, Dias and Riedweg suggest that the “real Brazil” that must be addressed cannot merely be grasped through progressive documentary or collaborative practices that attempt to empower subjects to speak. It is also a matter of recognizing how these representations fit into a larger international circuit of cultural capital that demands they be prepared in a certain way before being digested.

Within the context of *Documenta 12*, Dias and Riedweg combine the tactics of progressive cultural projects that take up marginal spaces (in this case, the literally unmapped territory of the favela) with a much older history of ethnographic representation, a tradition that similarly positioned its subjects as outside the political order for far less liberating agendas. In

so doing, the artists provide a critical lens through which to understand the space of the favela not as a generalized condition of political exclusion (Bare Life) but rather as a site *produced* by well-trod representational practices that serve to *enframe* the favela as the logical site for politically progressive art. The Bare Life of the favela does not emerge on its own, but rather is born out of representations and disciplinary knowledge (ethnographic chief among them) that make subjects intelligible and manageable within certain paradigms of power and control. In order for the favelas to operate within the global market as an endless source material for engaged collaborative art, it needs to be filtered in order that it function as modernity's limit case and exemplary site. This process of enframing, of making visible in order to make known, brings us back to the fundamental colonial project that proceeds from sight to knowledge in pursuit of capital accumulation.⁴ In posing the problem this way, *Funk Staden* allows both for a critical read of the favela within contemporary art as a gesture towards an ideal of increased visibility and empowerment while, at the same time, it maintains the separation between center and margin that have long functioned within representations of cultural difference.

This is the double-bind of community-based collaborative art in which Dias and Riedweg repeatedly find themselves. The performative power of certain kinds of representations, made imperative by virtue of their repetition, also engenders the same material inequalities that engaged community-collaborations seek to undo. Through invoking the anthropophagite aesthetic traditions within the space of the favela, Dias and Riedweg also inevitably extend anthropofagia's ambivalent critical gesture from *within* the terms and technologies of contemporary networks of power in attempts to express a counter-hegemonic reality. However, *Funk Staden* also highlights what is usually lost in collaborative projects that intervene in the lives of marginalized 'others': the fact that, like the community itself, the artwork becomes the

⁴ Here I am referring to Timothy Mitchell's use of "enframing" as a central strategy of colonialism, 34-62.

commodity within the cosmopolitan world of the mega-exhibit, and the artist the new flexible work force within what Toby Miller has called “the new transnational division of cultural labor” in which raw materials from the developing world (here, the marginal community group) are transformed into cultural capital.⁵ And here there are two types of value extracted from collaborative art; the value produced by artists with highly developed intellectual capital and the value rendered by ‘communities’ whose cultural capital is gauged in measures of marginality and whose actual labor and symbolic value added to art, unlike the artist, usually goes uncompensated.

⁵ See Miller, Yudice, and Lewis for further insights into the expanded cultural economy.

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Daniel Montero

**Suplemento: contra una dialéctica positiva entre la institucionalidad y la
alternatividad en el arte mexicano de los años 90**

I. Los presupuestos (o la posibilidad de salir del círculo)

Es un hecho que cuando se habla de arte mexicano de los años 90's en una de las cosas que se debe pensar es en los llamados "espacios alternativos"¹, esos lugares que nunca se ha definido de manera coherente y cuya conceptualización no ha sido aun realizada con profundidad. Los museos y otras formas de exhibición son, sin lugar a dudas, importantes para la década pero más allá de su posicionamiento oficial como referente quedan en un segundo lugar, como si fueran el mal necesario para que "la otra" postura tuviera lugar. Sin embargo, a estas últimas instituciones tampoco les ha ido nada bien en las narrativas históricas contemporáneas: o se les sobrevalora o se les subvalora indiscriminadamente. Ni unos ni otros han encontrado la justa medida y mucho menos se ha pensado en una articulación posible. Las soluciones: o enfrentarlos irreconciliablemente usando para ello una descripción hegeliana positivista del desarrollo histórico del fenómeno, o presentando la situación como un *zeitgeist* en la cual las cosas se presentan como "lo que debieron ser", como un ajuste temporal (y por supuesto histórico) en el que se coordinaron una serie de elementos artísticos y extra-

¹ Hay que hacer una aclaración respecto a los conceptos de alternatividad en el arte y de espacio alternativo. Es muy claro que este texto deja ver que la alternatividad es muy relativa a ciertos contextos, y que la misma idea de alternatividad debe ser criticada, deconstruida y desplegada a profundidad. El término, complejo en sí mismo, ha servido tradicionalmente para nombrar ese tipo de espacios pero eso no quiere decir que no haya existido otro. Ese se privilegió, creo yo, por la relación que establece con otras manifestaciones culturales que también han sido denominadas de esa manera (música, cine etc). Sin embargo, otros términos se han usado para remitirse a ese tipo de espacios; *Galerías de Autor* como los llama Mónica Meyer, o *Espacios espontáneos* como los refiere Eduardo Abaroa son otros nombres que se pueden encontrar en el argot. No obstante conservo el término "alternativo" por dos razones: la primera es que es mucho más fácil identificar a qué me estoy refiriendo precisamente por lo común del término; en segundo lugar me parece pertinente la raíz etimológica de la palabra "alternativo" para el presente texto: *alternat*: hecho por turnos; de *alternus*: cualquier otro; de *alter*: de otro, el otro. Esa construcción me servirá para poder decir que el otro como "otro" adquiere voz y en ese sentido la palabra alternativo funciona. Conservo las comillas para referirme a este tipo de espacios para aclarar que la discusión esta aún abierta.

artísticos de manera tal que la configuración del campo fue *razonada*. Por ahora muy pocos discursos se han interesado en deconstruir lo ya dicho (que es poco en cantidad y en calidad análisis). Dentro de los discursos que se salen de la medianía está el de José Luis Barrios *Descentramientos del arte contemporáneo: de los espacios alternativos a las nuevas capitales*, un texto fundamental que trata el tema a partir del desmembramiento que ha sufrido el país en los últimos 30 años, traducido en un descentramiento en donde se ponen en juego los sistemas simbólicos y discursivos y que es producto de la liberación de fuerzas del sistema social, moral, político y cultural. No obstante, por estar incluido en una recopilación de textos² no despliega todo su potencial discursivo y deja en el aire afirmaciones e ideas que podrían ser desarrolladas con mayor claridad y profundidad. El otro artículo que va en contravía de las afirmaciones comunes que se han aportado sobre el tema es *Bitácora Artística: condiciones del arte de los 90*, un texto sin publicación que hizo Eduardo Abroa como tesis de licenciatura para titularse de la UNAM. Ese texto funciona como una crítica efectiva muy desde adentro a los llamados “espacios alternativos” (término que Abaroa se encarga de criticar y de desmontar ya que perteneció a uno, Temístoclés 44, e intento vincularse a otro, La Panadería) y narra el conflicto implícito que existe al fundar un espacio.

A pesar de que estos textos son definitivamente novedosos dentro de lo poco que se ha escrito al respecto, todos los argumentos que intentan realizar un mapeo general por el fenómeno tienen varias constantes que se describen como importantes: La fundación del CONACULTA en 1988 como organismo institucional gubernamental articulador de una serie de políticas culturales y la posterior la creación del FONCA, la entrada en escena

² José Luis Barrios, *Los descentramientos del arte contemporáneo: de los espacios alternativos a las nuevas capitales*, en *Hacia otra historia del arte*, México, CONACULTA, 2004.

de la sociedad civil como consecuencia del terremoto de 85, la apertura económica del TLCAN y la crisis del 94 con la aparición del EZLN, la participación de la inversión privada en la cultura del país y el descentramiento de la cultura a otras capitales.

Aunque evidentemente todo eso es relevante, la articulación de esos elementos ha sido deficiente y poco crítica -como ya se anunciaba más arriba- sin ser un secreto que, por ejemplo, la creación de CONACULTA influyó en la constitución de los espacios alternativos, y que además, si no fuera por la sociedad civil estos últimos tampoco hubieran operado (no hubieran siquiera aparecido). ¿Qué fue lo que propició entonces la aparición de una serie de lugares que aparentemente no tenían que ver con la institucionalidad de los museos (y para hacer una extensión, de la institucionalidad gubernamental)? y, más allá de esa pregunta, habría que formular si hay alguna forma de poner todo eso junto sin que aparezca una dialéctica positiva en donde el enfrentamiento de la institucionalidad y la “alternatividad” es inminente y donde el resultado es tipificado como una victoria de estos últimos ya no como alternatividad sino como institucionalidad. Si bien es cierto que el círculo institucionalidad-alternatividad-institucionalidad es evidente y que se le adjudica ese “círculo vicioso” al mercado que aparece como un hoyo negro del cual nada escapa (ni si quiera la “luz alternativa”) hay que pensar también en dos cosas: el punto del disturbio en ese trinomio llamado alternatividad no es tan “alternativo” (o no es sólo “alternativo”) como se cree pero obviamente tampoco es “institucional”; por otra parte hay unas nuevas características de esa última institucionalidad que ahora negocia, ya no sólo con el Estado (como la primera institucionalidad), sino con la inversión privada.

La visión de ese panorama es bastante más compleja si se tiene en cuenta que el “disturbio” es una simultaneidad de cosas más que una seguidilla de eventos en donde participan personajes muy conocidos (generación de la ruptura por ejemplo), no tan conocidos (como la generación de los grupos) y personajes de todas las áreas de la cultura además de nuevos actores, como los extranjeros (los muy mencionados Francis Alÿs y Melanie Smith entre otros y la figura del curador). Me centraré en ese punto de disturbio para poder hacer mi propia articulación de hechos que tiene por protagonistas a la institucionalidad y a la alternatividad representadas en el CONACULTA-FONCA y los espacios “alternativos” respectivamente.

II. Tomando el micrófono (o el efecto karaoke)

En 1988 Carlos Salinas de Gortari creó por decreto presidencial el Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (CONACULTA), en 1989 el Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (FONCA), y en 1994 el Centro Nacional de las Artes (CNA) como programas que suponía una política cultural estatal cuyo fin era establecer un apoyo directo, efectivo y descentralizado a la cultura y al arte mexicanos renovando las viejas practicas de gestión cultural del país: la consigna era *modernizar la cultura*. Simultáneamente a ese suceso, una serie lugares conocidos como “espacios alternativos” aparecían por la Ciudad de México como una constante que suponía una libertad que se alejaba de, por un lado, las prácticas neomexicanistas principalmente pictóricas de la década anterior y por otro, de la oficialidad de los museos. Esas dos formas de asumir el arte por lo general se han visto como separadas y que ambas van en contravía la una de la otra. De hecho, constantemente se ha escrito que una estrategia de evadir dichas políticas que excluían a “los jóvenes” y que no se fijaban en una serie de

prácticas menos tradicionales del arte era fundar o establecer un espacio “alternativo” en donde sí se pudiese desplegar libertades que constituían, más que una forma de hacer obra, una forma de ser. Sin embargo, creo que ese tipo de afirmaciones es muy parcial. Es claro que sí había un descontento generalizado por parte de la comunidad artística respecto a lo que se exhibía en los museos pero eso no significa que se estuviera en contra de esas instituciones y que los artistas pertenecientes a la “alternatividad” quisieran acabar con esa forma institucional de exhibición. Antes de desarrollar más esa idea me gustaría referirme a una variable adicional que, creo, es fundamental para entender el surgimiento los espacios “alternativos”. Muchos han indicado (Mónica Mayer, Cuauhtémoc Medina y José Luís Barrios entre otros) que la aparición de la sociedad civil a partir del sismo del 85 es necesaria para entender el fenómeno de esos espacios alternativos. La pregunta que yo me hago es por qué es importante y en qué sentido contribuyó la sociedad civil a la creación de dichos lugares.

Como lo indica José Luís Barrios

el terremoto del 85 significó un cambio en la configuración de la estructura simbólico-cultural mexicana, principalmente en el reconocimiento por parte de la sociedad de su capacidad de organización y autogestión más allá del poder de administración central del Estado; también en lo político reveló estructuras muy primarias de la corrupción del sistema jurídico; en lo demográfico, propició el desplazamiento de muchos habitantes de la ciudad hacia el interior del país; en lo artístico puso en claro la necesidad de organizaciones que gestionen y autogestionen la producción y la difusión del arte. Así pues, la conciencia de la catástrofe llevó a una nueva organización social en la que sobre todo la sociedad civil adquirirá una relevancia significativa en el desarrollo de la nueva discursividad artística y dónde el ascenso de las grandes empresas tendrá un lugar relevante en la nueva geopolítica del arte en México³.

Esa nueva organización lo que hizo fue darle voz a los que antes no la tenían, y pone en juego una política muy particular donde los que antes no contaban empiezan a tener cuenta o, en otras palabras, a ser tenidos en cuenta. La política así entendida es un

³ José Luís Barrios, *Los descentramientos del arte contemporáneo: de los espacios alternativos a las nuevas capitales*, en *Hacia otra historia del arte*, México CONACULTA, 2004, pp 158.

proceso de reconfiguración de lo sensible en donde se hace visible lo que antes no lo era. Pero no hay que confundir el tener parte de la sociedad civil como un conjunto o un *orden otro* sino como la deslocalización del orden en todos los sentidos que eso implica: de lugar, del sitio y también de los símbolos. Esa lucha (o el litigio que en este caso viene siendo lo mismo) que se da entre el orden estatal y la sociedad civil propicia una *diferencia* en un sentido amplio de esa palabra. Dicha diferencia genera una especie de vacío litigioso por el empoderamiento del sentido que tiene que ver precisamente con la palabra: es un acto de enunciación. Por supuesto, tomar la palabra, robarla, o ponerla en juego está en relación con esa *diferencia* señalada más arriba. El que antes no era nombrado (o no era tenido en cuenta) ahora lo es. El disenso político es expresado en ese sentido como un *suplemento* porque siempre está fuera de la contabilidad de las instituciones estatales. La política no es una relación de poder sino una modalidad específica de acción colectiva que topa necesariamente con el poder establecido y crea un nuevo espacio, abre otro mundo, otra realidad. Personas que estaban completamente desidentificadas y que por supuesto no tenían representación alguna (valga decir que tampoco tenían representatividad) se organizan para realizar diferentes actividades entre esas comenzar a mostrar su trabajo artístico en lugares que, para usar palabras de Yishai Jusidman, parecían ratoneras. Si la participación y empoderamiento de funciones se dieron en muchos campos sociales, las artes plásticas no fueron la excepción. Los artistas en general comenzaban a sentir una necesidad de representación y decidieron por la autorepresentación. En lugar de pelear por un lugar en los museos (por lo menos esto fue así antes del 94 por razones que se explicarán más adelante) los artistas decidieron fundar sus propios lugares o *darse* lugar. La importancia del sitio, así fuera efímero, tenía un significado particular: poder representar lo que antes no tenía representación inauguraba un sitio, pero al mismo tiempo esa era la forma de darse voz (visibilidad).

Como se ha dicho muchas veces pero sin mucha convicción, hubo una confluencia de propuestas por esa visibilidad y todos entraron en juego. Artistas de diferentes generaciones y de diferentes tipos, con propuestas plásticas completamente disímiles luchaban por abrirse paso hacia esa visibilidad: desde lo más comercial como el espacio Zona hasta Temístocles 44 con su afán de discusión que suponía un debate más “serio” (aunque hay que aclarar que en Zona se dieron algunas de las discusiones más interesantes sobre arte de ese momento). Desde artistas de generaciones anteriores como Mónica Meyer y Victor Lerma con el espacio Pinto mi Raya a personas muy jóvenes como el mismo Eduardo Abaroa y Abraham Cruz-Villegas. Desde el performance como posibilidad hasta los objetualismos y neo-conceptualismos. Todo tenía cabida pero al final, no todo tuvo la misma visibilidad. O sea, cuando el disturbio pasó, lo que quedó fue la estandarización de todo eso: un orden que volvió otra vez a llenar todos los espacios del litigio. En este punto debo hacer una aclaración: no todos los espacios fueron de la misma índole y se pueden separar claramente en dos grupos: los primeros, desde el 88 hasta el 93 que son espacios más efímeros, algunos más festivos que otros pero con la constante que tenían una vida muy corta; y otros espacios que lograron mantenerse gracias al apoyo de becas y la internacionalización de sus propuestas en el que el ejemplo más claro es La Panadería.

Por supuesto, la sociedad civil organizada en espacios “alternativos” estaba en conflicto con la institucionalidad estatal que en ese momento se encargaba de distribuir la cultura con una forma de política cultural que suponía una horizontalidad. La creación del CONACULTA y del FONCA es precisamente un intento de pluralización cultural que pretendía una participación descentrada y más justa. La reorganización que realiza el CONACULTA y su promoción de la cultura, y los apoyos en forma de becas a través

del FONCA tienen dos características que me interesa resaltar: la apertura a la inversión privada y la posibilidad de la financiación a nuevas propuestas; todo eso, por supuesto, para traer capitales donde antes no había inversión que no fuera del Estado. Más allá del supuesto de que el Consejo fue una herramienta de control de los grupos de intelectuales para que se alinearan a favor de las políticas neoliberales del gobierno salinista o que fue una estrategia política para la aprobación del TLCAN, es importante decir que las políticas culturales de esa época (y hasta ahora sigue siendo igual) tenían, así mismo dos características fundamentales: nunca hubo una legislación específica que garantizara la continuidad de proyectos y de fondos y por otro lado, cada decisión se tomaba dependiendo de la subjetividad del mando medio en turno. Aunque se promocionaron grandísimas exposiciones de arte mexicano por todo el mundo con los fondos mixtos del CONACULTA y la iniciativa privada (muchas de ellas comenzando en el arte prehispánico y terminando el recuento histórico en los años 60, o sea con la generación de la ruptura) como *Esplendores de 30 siglos*, el arte contemporáneo parecía no tener el mayor interés por las clases gobernantes. Sin embargo, los huecos jurídicos que se hicieron evidentes después de la fundación del CONACULTA (porque el Estado mexicano “nunca tuvo un verdadero interés en la cultura”⁴) fueron llenados precisamente por esa sociedad civil en forma de espacios alternativos y diferentes manifestaciones culturales. Es muy significativo por ejemplo que el libro de Rafael Tovar y de Teresa sobre las políticas culturales del sexenio salinista no contemple a la sociedad civil como promotora o fundadora de espacios culturales de ninguna índole. Por supuesto, eso tiene que ver con la imposibilidad de enunciación del poder como ordenador de la división de lo sensible.

⁴ Bernardo Mabire, *Políticas culturales y educativas del estado mexicano de 1970 a 1997*, México, Colmex, pp 69.

De la misma manera, el destino de las becas del FONCA propició un fenómeno interesante: muchos de esos recursos se destinaron a espacios “alternativos” y los que tuvieron mayor continuidad fueron los que supieron aprovechar ese recurso más eficazmente. Como lo afirma Eduardo Abaroa

“El estado se convirtió, paradójicamente, en la principal fuerza de espacios que se parecían a las propuestas entonces conocidas como “alternativas”. Una vez que se dieron cuenta de las posibilidades que el presupuesto estatal significaba, los productores de arte pusieron manos a la obra en la ejecución de proyectos más ambiciosos. A pesar de que la tendencia general en el país trataba de afianzar un mayor liberalismo económico, muchos artistas obtuvieron subsidios en forma de becas individuales y colectivas”⁵.

Las becas del FONCA son otorgadas por un consejo que cambia cada 3 años y es regulado por la misma comunidad artística. La decisión de a quién se le otorga la ayuda pertenece a los mandos medios de la institución . Es así como se aprovecharon una serie de recursos de fondos mixtos (como el fideicomiso con la Fundación Rockefeller), dependiendo de los criterios de los jurados de turno, en labores de promoción y de sustentabilidad de la disidencia organizada. De esa manera el gobierno financió, parcialmente pero de manera directa, a su supuesta contraparte. Los organizadores de los espacios en ninguna medida se opusieron a eso y por supuesto lo buscaron de manera conciente. Como lo describió puntualmente Yoshua Okon, uno de los fundadores de La Panadería en una entrevista personal, “los dineros estaban y lo único que nosotros hicimos fue aprovechar esa situación”. Es más, lo que intentaban todos los artistas era tener una visibilidad sin importar de donde venían los fondos: todos querían ser artistas! Es precisamente en ese sentido a lo que me refería más arriba cuando decía que los nuevos artistas lo que querían era exhibir su trabajo sin tener la consigna, muy vanguardista por cierto, de acabar con los museos. Eso se puede ver claramente en la exposición *ACNÉ o el nuevo contrato social ilustrado* en donde muchos de los artistas

⁵ Eduardo Abaroa, *Bitácora artística: condiciones del arte de los 90*, Tesis para obtener el grado de Licenciado en arte. UNAM. 1997.

“jóvenes” pertenecientes a esa alternatividad institucional no tuvieron problema en mostrar su trabajo en el Museo de Arte Moderno de la Ciudad de México.

Los espacios “alternativos” fundaron así un lugar que no se veía hace mucho tiempo en el arte mexicano. Redistribuyeron las zonas de exhibición pero también la forma de vida de la ciudad (en especial la zona Roma-Condesa) y pluralizaron, así fuera por un tiempo limitado que no duró más de 12 años, las manifestaciones artísticas del panorama nacional.

III. Una inversión de sentido (o de cómo lo otro se vuelve lo mismo)

En la Revista Generación, en 1998, Carlos Blas Galindo afirmó

“Si en nuestras artes visuales por alternativas se alude a sus tendencias expansionistas, de igual manera cabe poner en duda que se trate de artes alternativas. Más que de artes habría que referirse en este caso a géneros: el de los ensamblajes, el de las acumulaciones (previo al de las instalaciones que, en nuestro país, fue más bien setentero), el de las ambientaciones (escasamente desarrollado aquí), el de los happenings o de los eventos de participación pública, el de las neográficas, el del uso de las tecnologías digitales y del video. Algunos efímeros; no objetuales los más. Géneros que inicialmente fueron alternativos debido a que eran nuevos y no convencionales--y cuyos practicantes pioneros fueron los neovanguardistas de los sesenta. Géneros que hoy en día cuentan no sólo con aceptación plena, sino que incluso, en bastantes casos, llegan a ser los privilegiados.”⁶

La pregunta por la alternatividad que se hace Carlos Blas-Galindo en esa cita va ligada a los medios de trabajo y en la estandarización estética que ya a finales de los 90 se venía sintiendo como una constante en todos los espacios “alternativos”. En ese sentido, había que esperar a que la alternatividad tuviera alguno de estos destinos: o desapareciera por completo, o siguiera produciendo formas cada vez más novedosas de producción situando al país en un referente artístico mundial o incorporar ese tipo de propuesta al poder Estatal. La segunda opción es una realidad a medias y la tercera es un hecho convirtiendo a la primera posibilidad así mismo, en un hecho, ya que la idea de

⁶ Carlos Blas Galindo, *Los públicos frente a los nuevos géneros*, Revista Generación, octubre 1998, número 20, año X, tercera época, México D.F.

alternatividad desapareció. Después de una serie de depuraciones y de cierres sistemáticos de los espacios, de la apertura de galerías comerciales que incorporaban la nueva estética como la forma que se vendía y se exportaba en forma de piezas para colecciones (la galería Kurimanzutto es el ejemplo clave en este caso), el arte contemporáneo mexicano disidente de los espacios alternativos dejó de ser “disidente” y “alternativo” para ser solamente contemporáneo y entrar a muchos de los museos de IMBA en la Ciudad de México. Es así como para finales del milenio, ese tipo de estética se incorporó al sistema de poder en forma de evento comercial-promocional-nacional en la Feria Arco 2005 en Madrid a la que México fue el invitado de honor. En esa ocasión el presidente Vicente Fox y su esposa Marta Sahagún jugaron tenis de mesa en la mesa de Gabriel Orozco, uno de los artistas más influyentes para esa generación. Es así como la incorporación al sistema artístico nacional e internacional de un tipo de estética específica da cuenta del giro que vivió el país a finales de ese milenio y como lo indica José Luís Barrios, en los últimos 30 años del siglo XX. La cultura nacional sigue con los mismos vicios que antes pero esta vez no parece haber un contrapunto a la estandarización a lo que Mónica Meyer preguntaba en una entrevista personal: ¿de verdad cree que hubo un cambio en el sistema? En este momento no soy capaz de formular una respuesta a esa cuestión. Lo que sí puedo indicar es que el relevo a esta nueva forma de institucionalidad que ahora pasa por la inversión privada negocia con otras variables y con otras formas de enunciación. Los capitales simbólicos que están en juego ahora son otros y eso habrá que verlo en detalle en otra investigación. Por ahora vale decir que el cambio es real y que pasó necesariamente por los espacios “alternativos”.

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Information (1970), held at the Museum of Modern Art, was a landmark exhibition on the emerging conceptualist movement. Organized by Kynaston McShine, it included 150 artists from fifteen countries, many exhibiting in the U.S. for the first time. Among these were sixteen artists with origins in the Southern Cone and Puerto Rico who McShine saw as paramount to this new trend. Using *Information* as a case study, I consider the ability of international exhibitions of contemporary art to incorporate Latin American artists, and the degree to which geographical specificity is necessary in interpreting their work. This is part of a larger discourse on whether Latin American art should be exhibited in terms of regional specificity, or placed within an international framework based on formal affinity or the international dialogues in which it participated. I argue that this exhibition was especially conducive to an international display because much of the art was universally intelligible or dealt with inherently transnational issues. This is reinforced in the artists' statements for the catalog, in which they deny strict national allegiance or definition. Nevertheless, the strides made by this exhibition were soon forgotten, for these Latin American artists were excluded in later exhibitions on conceptual art and were only addressed in revisionist shows such as *Global Conceptualism* (1999). By looking at the critical reception of *Information* and exhibitions that followed, I explore the factors that led to their subsequent exclusion from the mainstream canon, which has further implications for the relative advantages and disadvantages of the international display of Latin American art.

“A Third Way”: *Information* (1970) and the International Exhibition of
Contemporary Art from Latin America

Anna Katherine Brodbeck

*i am not here representing brazil; or representing anythingelse ... to survive brazil:
exportation and the take-over of an universal face than can be the possible brazil, the
country that simply doesn't exist.*

— Hélio Oiticica

I am here, in this exhibition, to defend neither a career nor any nationality.

— Cildo Meireles

International Information

Information, held from 2 July–20 September 1970 at the Museum of Modern Art, was a landmark exhibition on the movement now commonly known as conceptualism.

Organized by Kynaston McShine, it included 150 artists from fifteen countries. These artists, from diverse nations, participated in a trend that took on a truly global dimension, often utilizing forms of mass communication or other tactics to reach audiences beyond their countries of origin.¹ This global character was essential to the exhibition. In the catalog and related press materials, the show's organizers boast of its international scope, citing the participation of artists from several countries who were exhibiting in the U.S. for the first time. The origins of these artists is clearly stated in the biographic information included in the exhibition catalog, which notes the city and country in which each was born and currently worked, recognizing that these are often not the same.

Although McShine was an associate curator in MoMA's Painting and Sculpture Department, the show was held under the auspices of its International Council;

Information thus represented a rare instance of collaboration between the two distinct departments.² This collaboration was fitting, however, for McShine's desire to make the

show international was present from the beginning.³ On 27 October 1969, in an exhibition proposal to Waldo Rasmussen, the Council's director, he writes:

The Museum of Modern Art has always taken an interest in younger artists from abroad; however, recently they have been somewhat neglected. The purpose of this exhibition is to show the 'international avant-garde' and to demonstrate that, at this time, there is a great deal of creativity which overrides national boundaries and artists are not as centered in any one place as previously.⁴

This new geographic mobility was afforded by the art's unique formal properties. As McShine explains:

Increasingly artists use the mail, telegrams, telex machines, etc., for transmissions of works themselves—photographs, films, documents—or of information about their activity. For both artists and their public it is a stimulating and open situation, and certainly less parochial than even five years ago. It is no longer imperative for an artist to be in Paris or New York. Those far from the 'art centers' contribute more easily, without the often artificial protocol that at one time seemed essential for recognition.⁵

McShine recognized that this new type of artistic production, by usurping the privileged positions of New York and Paris, rendered old geographic hierarchies irrelevant, thereby eliminating the distinction between center and periphery.

Among these hitherto "peripheral" artists were nineteen with origins in either the Southern Cone or Puerto Rico. Notably, McShine actively sought out Latin American artists to include in his show, even prior to his selection of any specific artists or works.⁶ During a research visit to Europe in September 1969, he saw the work of Hélio Oiticica, who in turn became the first Latin American artist selected for participation.⁷ However, it is clear that by this time McShine had already decided to include Latin American artists, as he had received substantial contact information for Latin American artists and critics working in Europe, the U.S., and their home countries from Elaine Johnson of the International Council immediately before leaving for Europe.⁸

McShine was prepped by institutional channels, but his choices were not dictated by those suggestions. For example, Johnson had provided the curator with substantial lists of Venezuelan artists working at home and abroad, yet none was included in the

show.⁹ With the exception of the Puerto Rican-born Rafael Ferrer, the Latin American artists represented in the show came exclusively from Southern Cone, where McShine had developed important contacts. In order to select the participants, McShine conducted his own field research, making trips to Brazil and Argentina in November 1969 to meet the artists and attend important exhibitions.¹⁰ This firsthand knowledge proved critical in allowing McShine to bypass institutional circuits that often privilege the institutions' own, often political motives. While in Argentina, McShine encountered artists through the Instituto Torcuato di Tella, where he met the progressive critic Jorge Romero Brest, and attended the influential exhibition *Materiales: Nuevas Técnicas, Nuevas Expresiones* at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes. McShine also went to Brazil, but many of the relationships he fostered with artists there were in fact facilitated by Oiticica, who put the curator in contact with the other Brazilian artists, such as Rubens Gerchman in New York, and served as a liaison to the artists still living in Brazil, even helping to transport their art to the United States.

McShine also encountered artists through their international work in the U.S. and Europe. Carlos D'Alessio was active in New York prior to *Information* and performed a musical event in the museum's gardens a month prior to the exhibition's opening.¹¹ Rafael Ferrer was teaching in Philadelphia at the time and had shown extensively in the country, including at the *Anti-Illusion* exhibition at the Whitney in 1969 and in a one-man show at the Leo Castelli gallery in 1970. David Lamelas was known through his European exhibitions, such as his *Time as Activity* from Antwerp's Wide White Space Gallery.

Information presents an early example both of the incorporation of Latin American artists within an international framework and of what is gained and lost in such an approach. This issue has been addressed in scholarship on modern artists from Latin America who were also participating in larger trans-national dialogues. In the introduction to the *Geometry of Hope* exhibition, Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro describes the

advantages and disadvantages of treating such art either from within a Latin American specificity or else as completely decontextualized from such geographic groupings.¹² While the contextual model “reduces each movement to an illustration of a context ... that [may] have little or no connection as the same,” the formalist model “radically decontextualizes artists, presenting works in terms of relationships that are based [solely] on optical or formal similarities.”¹³ Pondering an alternative, Pérez-Barreiro asks, “Can we discuss context without being illustrative, while also recognizing that context is an essential element in the configuration of meaning?”¹⁴ For the *Geometry of Hope*, he addresses this concern by organizing the exhibition according to the city in which the art was produced, an apt solution for the modern era, whereby cities served as the main loci of artistic production, exhibition, and exchange. Admittedly, McShine does not explore the geographic context of the art represented in depth, opting instead to highlight the common concerns of artists working in an increasingly globalized society. This raises important questions. Can international exhibitions maintain context as essential to meaning? Is context always essential to meaning, especially in the era after modernism? Like Pérez-Barreiro, Guy Brett has also argued for a “third way [in the representation of Latin American art] beyond ... homogenization and polarization,” and he suggests that *Information* might serve as one such an alternative.¹⁵ It is this possibility of a “third way,” and the role geographic context must play in such an approach, to which we now turn.

Contributions of Latin American Artists

In order to address these issues, it is first necessary to establish the degree to which such context is required in order to interpret the contributions of Latin American artists in *Information*. This is an especially pertinent consideration, as the works vary widely. Some take their point of departure from more formal concerns, such as the piece contributed by Alejandro Puente, the New York-based Argentine artist who recreated his

work *Todo Vale* (1968) about color as language.¹⁶ This formal-based conceptualism is also characteristic of the work of Rafael Ferrer, who contributed an *Ice Piece*, whereby he placed eight tons of ice in MoMA's sculpture garden on opening night and left it to melt. Ferrer also displayed photographic documentation of *Deflected Fountain, for Marcel Duchamp* (1970), an earlier piece done at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in which the artist deflected a vertical flow of water into a path of 45 degrees by "the simplest means possible." Other artists, such as Group Frontera, an Argentine artist collective, contributed works that utilized new technologies.¹⁷ These artists installed a cabin with video recording devices in which visitors could record themselves answering a series of questions, ranging from opinions on God, sex, and fashion, whose answers were then played back on screens outside of the cabin.¹⁸

Other pieces, including those by Cildo Meireles, Artur Barrio, and Jorge Carballa, contained more overt political commentary. The Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles contributed Coca-Cola bottles and stamped bank notes from his *Insertions into Ideological Circuits* series, inscribed with subversive messages such as "Yankees Go Home." These works typify Meireles's experiments in usurping controlled circuits of distribution in order to address issues of American neocolonialism and government censorship. Photographs made by Meireles's compatriot Artur Barrio of his *Situation T/T, I* (undertaken on 20 April 20 1970 in Belo Horizonte), were also shown, as well as a documentary video of the action. This intervention was part of a larger series whereby the artist dispersed sacks of perishable materials resembling body bags into the museums, streets, and waterways of Brazil. It can thus be read as a response to the state-sponsored terror imposed by Brazil's former military dictatorship. The Argentine Jorge Carballa originally planned to create a seven-meter circle on the floor of the museum, to which he would add photographs of all the rulers of American nations as well as texts of prophecies made by of a team of clairvoyants on the rulers' future performance.¹⁹

However, installation shots attest that the work was actually executed on the wall, and without photographs.²⁰

Other works, such those by the Brazilian artists Hélio Oiticica and Guilherme Magalhaes Vaz, relied directly on spectator participation. Oiticica created an environment expressly for the show entitled *Nests*.²¹ Part of his experiments in “Creleisure,” or “leisure propositions,” here Oiticica created a totally open piece, whereby the spectator’s experience became the work of art itself. Although Oiticica had originally wanted Brazilian films to be shown inside *Nests*, he was persuaded by McShine to abandon the idea, for a significant amount of films were also included in the exhibition and played on an Olivetti Video Jukebox.²² Guilherme Magalhaes Vaz contributed a work entitled *Facts*. This was composed of five “total situations or facts” that combined a photograph of an action being performed with written instructions to perform that action, thus inviting the viewer to complete the work.²³

The categories suggested here were not designated by the curator, and there are several points at which they overlap, for the work of Group Frontera, Meireles, and Barrio also utilize spectator involvement. Correspondingly, the exhibition design does not appear to privilege groupings based on strictly formal or conceptual concerns. Indeed, based on what can be constructed from surviving installation shots, it is clear that some works were exhibited with little attention to such affinities. For example, the video booth created by Group Frontera is located next to a wall piece by Mel Bochner entitled *Measurement Series: By Formula (Circle)* that addresses none of the same issues concerning mass media and spectator participation. Nevertheless, this decontextualization does not necessarily hinder the appreciation of the work but rather invites spectators to search for their own connections. The display of these pieces allows for a flexibility of interpretation that is mirrored in the exhibition catalog, to which each artist also had an opportunity to contribute. While some artists’ contributions were distinct from their piece in the show (e.g., Meireles’s description of the Southern Cross), others simply submitted

photographs of the works contained in the exhibition. Furthermore, some artists who were featured in the catalog did not participate in the exhibition. These include Marta Minujín who contributed photographs of the “minuphone” and “minucode” that she had exhibited in New York in 1967–68. The catalog’s groundbreaking format, with the artists arranged alphabetically and without a preordained interpretation suggested by their layout, represents yet another exhibition strategy that allowed for multiple connections to be made between a wide array of works.

The exhibition neither created sharp distinctions between formal or conceptual affinities nor segregated on the basis of the artists’ geographic origins. While this eliminated ghettoization, it was perhaps achieved at the expense of the national context crucial to understanding some of the works. This can be most clearly seen in the work of Artur Barrio, which engages the specific context of Brazil’s military dictatorship. Barrio’s interventions were meant to recall the disappearance of the country’s citizens and derived its meaning from its interaction with Brazilians who would have instantly recognized this significance. Although the wall label included next to the work would have explained that the *Situation* had originally taken place in Brazil, no additional information was provided.

In light of that omission, it is worth considering how the works surrounding Barrio’s photographs could effect the interpretation of the work. To the left, the New York-based artist Ira Joel Haber exhibited pages from Encyclopedia Americana’s *Presidents of the United States*, one page for each American president from George Washington to Richard Nixon. While this piece, entitled *Information Wall Work—36 Presidents* (1970), contains overt political content, the other works in the room display a more formal affinity. British artist Keith Arnatt contributed *TV Interference Project: Self-Burial* (1969), nine photographs of his gradual descent into a hole in the ground until his entire body became submerged.²⁴ In a piece entitled *Facial Angle* (1969), Richards Jarden, an American-born artist working in Canada, exhibited ten photographs of facial

profiles rotated at various angles.²⁵ These works are conceptually similar, inasmuch as they deal with the themes of corporeality and disappearance, yet they do not contain the same political content that is so crucial to Barrio's work. Moreover, they cannot elucidate the specifically national concerns addressed there.

The contributions of Cildo Meireles, which were located near Jorge Carballa's wall piece, would perhaps also have benefited from the inclusion of some contextual information.²⁶ As his work deals with inherently transnational concerns, like neocolonialism, however, it is less dependent on a strictly national reading. This approach is embodied by Meireles's entry for the catalog, which begins with a statement denying national allegiance: "I am here, in this exhibition, to defend neither a career nor any nationality."²⁷ While the artist then goes on to describe a specifically Brazilian myth, the Southern Cross, he appears to do so only to problematize the existence of true national boundaries.²⁸

This ambivalence is exemplified by the work of Oiticica, as is clear from both his universally legible environmental piece and his contribution to the catalog. There he writes:

i am not here representing brazil; or representing anythingelse: the idea of representing-representation-etc. are over; tropicália was a tentative to create a synthetic face-brazil : the image taken to a dimension 'more than that of representation': but i am not interested in that anymore... to survive brazil : exportation and the take-over of an universal face than can be the possible brazil, the country that simply doesn't exist.²⁹

These statements should be understood in the context of the disillusionment that Oiticica suffered when the term *Tropicália*, which he had coined in a 1967 environment, was co-opted for exactly the sort of stereotypical representations of cultural identity that he was seeking to challenge.³⁰

While these Brazilian artists reacted against geographic determinism as a means of cultural stereotyping, other artists emphasized their shared inheritance of a universal artistic tradition. This is most apparent in the case of Rafael Ferrer, who, as a Puerto

Rican artist working in the U.S., embodies the meaninglessness of a strictly national identification. As Ferrer explains:

I moved from Puerto Rico permanently to the U.S. in 1966. Among the people I met from the New York Art World was Edward Fry, then Curator at the Guggenheim. Ed got to know my work, was very supportive... Fry told me that he wanted to include me in the coming International and presented this proposal to Thomas Messer then Director of the Museum. Messer asked Fry: "What country is he from?" Fry replied: "Puerto Rico", to which Messer correctly responded: "That is not a Country."

I was not offended by this rejection. I considered it part of my experience in becoming an artist interested in an Art World which existed in the large World. I became an artist because I had the ambition of entering a tradition that was international in scope. Picasso, De Chirico, Matisse, Lam, Arp, Torres-Garcia, Bellmer, Mondrian. It's an endless list which continues to grow with only one constant. I could not care less about the birthplace of these Artists. That would come later. It was the Art that attracted me. This Art World was made up of people of all races, most of which lived in places other than their countries of origin.

Eventually I began to receive recognition for the work I was doing in this country. Kynaston McShine invited me to participate in his Information Show. The only reference to the Antilles where we were both born, was when I asked him about V.S. Naipaul born like Kynaston in Trinidad and living in England. Kynaston's interest and selections for that show came from the great interest in Conceptual Ideas represented by large exhibitions in European Museums with artists from all over.³¹

As this statement makes clear, these artists were keenly aware of the inability of their work to embody a geographic specificity. Indeed, it is precisely this aspect of their work that is key to the efficacy of *Information's* international approach.

Correspondingly, rather than segregating the artists based on geographic origins, McShine chose to emphasize their shared experiences. The late 1960s was an era shaped by student protests, the Vietnam War, and, in the case of Latin America, a series of military dictatorships with serious consequences for artistic production; this worldwide trauma served as a common theme for the exhibition. Therefore, this art was often inherently political in nature, and McShine posited that these new forms of art-making were best able to comment on the global situation. As he puts it in his catalog entry:

The material presented by the artists is considerably varied, and also spirited, if not rebellious—which is not very surprising, considering the general social,

political and economic crises that are almost universal phenomena of 1970. If you are an artist in Brazil, you know of at least one friend who is being tortured; if you are one in Argentina, you probably had a neighbor who has been in jail for having long hair, or for not being 'dressed' properly; and if you are living in the United States, you fear that you will be shot at, either in the universities, in your bed, or more formally in Indochina. It may seem too inappropriate, if not absurd, to get up in the morning, walk into a room, and apply dabs of paint from a little tube to a square of canvas. What can you as a young artist do that seems relevant and meaningful?... The art cannot afford to be provincial, or to exist only within its own history, or to continue to be, perhaps, only a commentary on art.³²

This early acknowledgment of Latin America's contribution to the new form of artistic production is perhaps surprising, as it is often the responsibility of revisionist texts to reclaim the region's place in hegemonic movements. In the case of *Information*, however, it appears as though Latin America was included from the beginning in a landmark show on the emerging movement; in fact, far from being peripheral, the incorporation of countries such as Argentina and Brazil among the relatively few included nations suggests that McShine appreciated their paramount importance to the new direction of art.

Reverberations of the Show

Nevertheless, this early acknowledgment of the contributions of Latin American artists to conceptualism did not preclude the necessity of such revisionist texts. Consider the scholarship accompanying *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*. As its title suggests, this exhibition, which was held from 19 December 1999 through 5 March 2000 at the Queens Museum before traveling to the Walker Arts Center and MIT, treats conceptualism as a worldwide phenomenon.³³ Organized by a curatorial team that included the Uruguayan conceptual artist and art historian Luis Camnitzer, it serves as an interesting counterpart to *Information*. While the original importance given to the artists by the earlier exhibition has been maintained and expanded, the spin on its relationship to international currents has significantly changed. Camnitzer delegated the task of interpreting the Latin American section to Mari Carmen Ramírez, who wrote the catalog essay on the region.³⁴ Here Ramírez creates a stark distinction between Latin American

conceptualism, which she sees as “ideological,” and European and North American conceptualism, which she sees as endemically formal. She writes:

From its earliest manifestations, conceptualism in our countries extended the self-referential principle of North American conceptual art to a reinterpretation of the social and political structures in which it was inscribed. For these producers, the search for antidiscursive strategies of making art ‘was no longer the concern of a group coming from an isolated elite, but a far-reaching cultural issue, of great amplitude, tending toward collective solutions.’ Thus, while North American artists—echoing Kosuth’s dictum, ‘the absence of reality in art is, precisely, the reality of art’—addressed their criticism to the institutionalized world of art, Latin American artists, for the most part, made the public sphere their target.³⁵

Of course, this insulation from political or social concerns is, as we have seen, far from McShine’s interpretation. While some of the North American and European artists included did concern themselves with more purely formal and linguistic issues, they were certainly not the only artists represented. Many other artists from these regions dealt directly with political issues. Two notable examples include Hans Haacke, whose MoMA poll posed the question “Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon’s Indochina policy be a reason for you not to vote for him in November?,” and John Giorno, whose *Dial-A-Poem* elicited significant controversy for containing messages from incendiary and revolutionary public figures.

While Ramírez’s generalizations on conceptualism’s North American and European manifestations fail to account for the full range of its practices, the critical reception of *Global Conceptualism* does betray the persistence of a hegemonic view of conceptual art that reinforces her position. This is exemplified in the exhibition’s review in the gallery guide of the *New Yorker*:

The show’s basic thesis holds that Conceptualism developed in the sixties as several independent movements in different locales, in contrast to its generally accepted history, which emphasizes a core group of mainly American artists—Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, Sol LeWitt, Hans Haacke, and others—and certain important European satellites. The premise is fine as a means of bringing to light hitherto neglected works, but the studious avoidance of the traditional history and figures becomes annoying.³⁶

This review suggests that the gains made by exhibitions such as *Information* in promoting an international and socially conscious view of conceptual art had unfortunately long been forgotten.

Indeed, there appears to be a “disconnect” between the original goals and reception of the exhibition and its subsequent erasure over time. The Latin American artists who participated in *Information* received good press notices and were widely acknowledged to be on an equal footing with their international peers. Interestingly, few exhibition reviews made any differentiation between the Latin American artists and the other participants. One exception can be seen in the review of Paul Steiner, writing for Pop Scene Service in the *Scrantonian*. Here Steiner somewhat naively attributes “foreign” participants’ excitement over access to technological improvements as a sign of America’s increased artistic freedom, the “foreign” specifically referring to the Argentine and Brazilian contributors.³⁷ Other reviewers, by contrast, take the Latin American contributors to be part and parcel of the new trend. Many, including John Perreault of the *Village Voice*, distinguish Oiticica’s environment as exceptional but make no special mention of his Brazilian nationality.³⁸ Curiously, the reviewer for *Art International* includes the South American artists with the Europeans in order to contrast them to the North American participants. He states, “the Europeans here—‘European’ includes South Americans—have dismissed themselves from their own, no longer reassuring cultural space.”³⁹

Some reviewers, most notably Hilton Kramer of the *New York Times*, were scandalized by the radical nature of this new form of artistic production. To McShine’s questioning of the relevance of painting during times of political crisis, Kramer responds:

The “Information” exhibition is Mr. McShine’s answer to this question. The ‘relevant and meaningful’ thing to do in the face of this grave political crisis is, apparently, to look at inane films through an Olivetti “visual jukebox,” ask spectators questions on closed-circuit delayed-tape television, scrawl circles and other graffiti on the walls, go to town with the Xerox machine, collect a lot of pointless photographic junk, listen to a poem on the telephone, or simply go to

sleep... What unmitigated nonsense this exhibition is! What tripe we are offered here! What an intellectual scandal!⁴⁰

This should be read as part of the larger, generational debate on what constitutes art; nevertheless, such assessments were wholly unrelated to the exhibition's inclusion of international participants.

So what is one to make of the fact that at such an early date Latin Americans exhibited in tandem with artists from the "artistic centers"? Is it possible that they could be considered mutually influential? How are they only included in a revisionist, and not the mainstream, canon? Unfortunately, it would seem that even when Latin American works are originally included in an early exhibition, this good favor may not last. Certainly, exhibitions are only one of several factors involved in canon formation, which also include whether the work was then acquired and shown, whether scholars wrote about it at the time, and whether international contemporary artists recognized it as influential.⁴¹ While no definite answers can be offered here, it could be suggested that McShine was almost too successful in incorporating Latin American artists in his international exhibition. By drawing on their commonalities and their denial that their work could be circumscribed by a national identity, these Latin Americans were cited as an equal, and therefore unexceptional, part of the larger sphere of socially conscious artists working in new media around the globe. By contrast to exhibitions that garner attention by differing their Latin American participants, in the case of *Information*, the inclusion of these artists appears to be so seamless that it was subsequently lost in the historical fold.

NOTES

¹ In spite of McShine's rhetoric of international inclusiveness, only artists from the U.S., Canada, Western Europe, Japan, Yugoslavia, Puerto Rico, Uruguay Argentina, and Brazil were represented in the exhibition. As we shall see, these geographic parameters, which seemed progressive at the time, were significantly expanded in later exhibitions such as *Global Conceptualism* (1999).

² McShine was in constant contact with the Painting and Sculpture Department, and through a series of memos he kept William Lieberman, head of that department, apprised of the exhibition's progress. Thus it appears that although the exhibition was held in conjunction with the International Council, Painting and Sculpture was intimately involved in its execution.

³ Although the show was undertaken under the direction of the International Council, it did not travel. A substantial number of museums were asked to participate but declined, citing insufficient funding and scheduling complications. These included the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Institute for the Fine Arts, Rice University; the University Art Museum, University of California; the San Francisco Museum of Art; the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University; the Art Gallery of Ontario; the Walker Art Center; the Corcoran Gallery of Art; and the Pasadena Art Museum. As many of these institutions were university museums, their more progressive nature was appropriate for the relatively controversial material; however, only one was located outside the United States. This suggests that the International Council was involved, not for diplomatic purposes, but rather as a resource for the inclusion of international participants. Waldo Rasmussen was director of the International Program from 1962–93.

⁴ Institutional archives.

⁵ This statement was altered from its original manifestation, preserved in the edits for the catalog, which reads: "It has allowed 'the provincial' artists to participate more completely since it is now possible to bypass the usual and often artificial steps to recognition in order to avoid the accusation of being derivative."

⁶ McShine's acknowledgment of the progressive artistic currents in Latin America, a subject that warrants further investigation, may have been a result of his prior exposure to the work of Oiticica, who had already garnered good critical favor in North America and Europe and had the support of critics such as Guy Brett and John Perreault.

⁷ The artist was then working in London in exile. In a memo of 2 October 1969 sent upon his return from Europe to Bill Lieberman, McShine included Oiticica in the "London" category.

⁸ Johnson joined MoMA's Department of Circulating Exhibitions in 1960, became an Assistant Curator in the Department of Drawings and Prints in 1961, and served as an Associate Curator in the same department from 1963 to 1971. She had worked on the exhibitions of *Orozco: Studies for the Murals at Dartmouth College*, and *The Responsive Eye* (1965), which featured the works of several Venezuelan-born artists.

⁹ This interesting omission could have been the result of the equation of Venezuelan artists with kinetic art embodied by the inclusion of Jesús-Rafael Soto and Carlos Cruz-Diez in MoMA's 1965 exhibition *The Responsive Eye*.

¹⁰ In a memo of 17 November 1969, McShine reported his travel plans to Bill Lieberman: “For my exhibition, I shall be leaving for South America around November 24 as it is necessary to get to Argentina before the summer begins and to San Paolo [sic] before the Bienale [sic] ends. I plan to visit Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, San Paolo [sic], and Caracas and shall probably be away about three weeks as at the end I plan to take a few days vacation.”

¹¹ For *Information*, D’Alessio presented his text for *Proyecto para un Concierto de Música Electrónica* and four photographs, most likely based on his performance of “Sounds from the Gardens of the Museum of Modern Art of New York” (25 May 1970).

¹² Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro, “Introduction,” *The Geometry of Hope: Latin American Abstract Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection* (Austin : Blanton Museum of Art, University of Texas at Austin, 2007), 11.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Guy Brett, “Border Crossings,” *Transcontinental: An Investigation of Reality: Nine Latin American Artists* (London: Verso, 1990), 11.

¹⁶ The catalog entry for the piece contains the following artist’s description of the work: “Color is the only visual element that has a grammar and syntactic properties of its own. In that sense, we can speak of color as language and analyze or present it according to its particular structure rules. When color rules are given previously (like in color swatchbooks provided by a certain manufacturer) then we should speak of color as code rather than language. My work is related to the manipulation of these individual syntactic elements and their materialization. The physical media then becomes unimportant and very specific and relevant at the same time. Unimportant because of its too general qualifications (color can be found everywhere) and relevant because, depending on the specific ‘qualities’ of the physical materializations, different language combinations can be ‘found’ or ‘proposed.” Reproduced *Information*, ed. Kynaston L. McShine (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 114.

¹⁷ This collective comprised the Argentine artists Adolfo Bronowski, Carlos Espartaco, Mercedes Esteves, and Inés Gross.

¹⁸ These questions, together with the artists’ statement on the role of mass communication in daily life, were subsequently published in the exhibition catalog.

¹⁹ In his correspondence with McShine, the artist offers the following description of the work: “La obra se desarrolla dentro de un círculo de 7 metros de diámetro, dibujado en el piso en el que se pegarán las fotografías de todos los gobernantes americanos. Un sector estará formado por objetos políticos-mentales pertenecientes a cada magistrado. En otro sector irán las profecías efectuadas por el equipo de videntes sobre cada uno de ellos. Es decir un plano político (pasado-actual) y otro mágico (personal-futuro) de los cuales espero obtener la clave mágico-política de América. Los textos irán escritos dentro de las figuras de círculo.”

²⁰ Unfortunately, no correspondence survives that accounts for the change in location and format of the works.

²¹ This was the second manifestation of a work completed in Sussex, *Barracao Experiment*. The exhibition checklist gives the following specifications for the work: burlap, branches, foam mattresses, pillows, silver foil, lights, etc., 12' high and 16 ½' wide and 21' deep.

²² In addition to Barrio's two untitled films, the Brazilian contributions consisted of Raymundo Amado, *Apocalipopotese (Guerra e Paz)* (1968), with music by Caetano Veloso and dancing by Mangueira; Antonio Carlos Fontoura, *Ver Ouvrir* (1967); and Paulo Roberto Martins and Jorge Sirito de Vives, *Brazil Arte Publica* (1968). The Argentine David Lamelas contributed *Time As Activity* (1969) and Rafael Ferrer added *Timbales. Ice. Buckets. Twin Line. Conga. Road Stain.* (1970).

²³ Of the piece, Vaz writes in his correspondence with McShine, "Total situation because of their unperceptable [sic] synthesis of all languages parameters. Facts because of their aggressive existence and reality."

²⁴ Reproduced in *Information*, 8.

²⁵ Reproduced in *ibid.*, 66.

²⁶ While Carballa's work also addressed an inherently political concern, it clearly did not engage the same alternative methods of dissemination that are present in the work of Meireles.

²⁷ Reproduced in *Information*, 85.

²⁸ The following is an excerpt from his statement: "I would rather speak about a region which does not appear on official maps, a region called the SOUTHERN CROSS. Its original inhabitants never divided it. Others came, however, who for some reason did it. Such a division remains to this day. I believe every region to have its boundary lines, imaginary or not. Its Eastern side you know rather well through post cards, pictures, descriptions and books. I would like however, to speak from the other side of this border.... And whenever listening to the History of this West, people will be listening to fantastic legends and fables and allegories. For a people who can transform its History into fantastic legends and fables and allegories, that people has a real existence." Here Meireles addresses both the exoticized vision of Brazil and offers an allegorical alternative, thus commenting on the imaginary constructions that come to define geographic areas.

²⁹ Reproduced in *Information*, 12.

³⁰ Guy Brett introduces this aspect of Oiticica's art in his discussion of *Information*, which he has lauded as an early example of a contemporary survey that successfully included artists outside North America and Europe. An early advocate and friend of Oiticica, Brett was responsible for bringing his work to the Whitechapel Gallery in London during his exile from Brazil. Guy Brett, "Border Crossings," *Transcontinental*, 11.

³¹ Rafael Ferrer, interview by the author, New York, NY, 22 April 2009.

³² Kynaston McShine, "Essay," *Information*, 183.

³³ Perhaps the most important show to address Latin American conceptual art after *Information*, this exhibition included more than 200 works by more than 130 artists from North America, Western and Eastern Europe, Australia and New Zealand, the Soviet Union, Africa, and Asia. Many of the Latin American participants from *Information* were incorporated in this later manifestation, as were additional artists who followed in a similar conceptual and political vein. The Latin American works included Antonio Dias *Oppressor/Oppressed* (1968); Artur Barrio *DEFL...--situation... +s+... streets* (April 1970); Victor Grippo *Analogy I* (1970-71); Alberto Greco, *Vivo Dito* (1962); Oscar Bony *Proletarian Family* (1968); Lygia Clark, *Dialogue of Hands* (1966); Hélio Oiticica, *Parangolé* (1967); Léon Ferrari “*El arca de Noé*” o “*El árbol embarazador*” 15/2/64 (1964); Antonio Caro, *Colombia/Coca Cola* (1976); Eduardo Costa, *Fashion Fictions* (1966-69); and Antonio Manuel, *Hot Ballot Boxes* (1968).

³⁴ Although Camnitzer did not at this juncture make a definitive statement on the differentiation between U.S. and Latin American conceptual practices, he seems to echo Ramírez’s sentiments in his seminal 2007 book on Latin American conceptualism, thanking her in the acknowledgements for shaping his theories on the subject. See Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007).

³⁵ Ramírez cites Oiticica, “General Scheme of the New Objectivity” (1967), in *Hélio Oiticica* (Rio de Janeiro: Projeto Hélio Oiticica, 1992), 110-20. Mari Carmen Ramirez, “Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960-1980,” in *Global Conceptualism : Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, ed. Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver, Rachel Weiss, László Beke (New York: Queens Museum of Art , 1999), 55.

³⁶ Cited in Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art*, 23.

³⁷ “Almost all the foreign artists were enthusiastic, however, about the degree of artistic freedom in the United States. Adolfo Bronowski and Ines Gross, members of Argentina’s Group Frontera (which displays a TV recording booth where visitors become the subjects of video and tape records), said that in Buenos Aires their type of art could not yet be granted a museum showing. ‘We don’t have a gallery that specializes in light and electronic art,’ Adolfo said. Ines, who was enjoying her first visit to New York, observed that, ‘At home, people are more alike, even if their skin color differs. Here you have a much greater variety of people. That’s what I like.’ Long-haired Hello Quiticia [sic] also noted that he’s never had a chance to show his environmental experiments anywhere except here and London. ‘It’s fantastic to work with American museum officials and technicians,’ he told me. ‘They are so much more efficient and responsible.’” Paul Steiner, “Modern Art Show Breaks Tradition,” *Scrantonian*, Scranton, PA (2 August 1970).

³⁸ Helio Oiticica is distinguished as one of the most important contributors, along with LeWitt, Bochner, Kosuth, and Haacke. Perreault writes: “For the first time in New York we also get to see the work of Helio Oiticica, known to me for his street events and his marvelous cape-pieces. Here he is represented by ‘Nests,’ a kind of crawl-in environment, constructed on three levels of wood and burlap” (John Perreault. *The Village Voice* [16 July 1970]). A photograph of “Nests” was also one of the most frequently reproduced images in the press; see, for example, its prominent display in “Art is a Two-Way Street,” Santa Paula, CA, September 2, 1970.

³⁹ *Art International* (20 September 1970).

⁴⁰ Hilton Kramer, “Miracles, ‘Information,’ ‘Recommended Reading,’” *New York Times* (12 July 1970).

⁴¹ The Museum acquired very few works from the show, as most consisted of photographic and textual documentation and were not yet considered unique works of art. Some of this material ended up in the archives, most notably the photographs of Rafael Ferrer. The mattresses and other materials used in Oiticica’s “Nests” were sold in a staff sale following the dismantling of the exhibition.

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Professional Experience

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- Spring 2007 Intern, Department of the Chief Curator at Large, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
Exhibition organized by Kynaston McShine, *Richard Serra: Forty Years* (June 3–September 24, 2007)
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Crossed images. Intellectuals and Art between Paris and Buenos Aires during the 1960's.

Isabel Plante

During the 1960's, the emigration of intellectuals from Argentina emerged as both a problem and a proof of the national artistic quality. The number of artists established abroad was continuously increasing and many of them were established at Paris. When the decline of the City of Light was matter of discussion, the Argentine intellectuals' bonds with it started to take on new shape. In Paris since 1949, in the 1960's Damián Bayón even made jokes such as: "Paris fits us so well that if it did not exist it would have to be invented for us".

Other intellectuals living abroad also reflected on their condition as foreigners: Juan José Saer, emigrated to France; Antonio Berni, who installed a studio in Paris in 1963; Luis Felipe Noé and Uruguayan Luis Camnitzer, both settled in New York; Copi, attempting to define the "Argentine of Paris"; Julio Le Parc, also in Paris, making of the foreign condition a sort of Latinamericanist activism. In face of the centre-periphery antinomy crystallized with the discourse of dependency, we aim at analyzing the spectrum of experiences revealed by these migrant individuals. The migration of intellectuals and cultural productions between Paris and Buenos Aires contributed to shape the representations of the French, the Argentine and the Latin American cultures in a period marked by the American hegemony and the emergence of the Third World. Thus, maps were outlined covering most of the scope of ideas about Europe and Latin America. Geographies that had New York as an unavoidable presence but, at the same time, included Latin America with a new political and cultural international visibility.

Imágenes cruzadas. Intelectuales y arte entre París y Buenos Aires durante los años '60

Isabel Plante, Instituto de Teoría e Historia de las Artes Julio E. Payró, FFyL-UBA

Parece entonces que hay aquí un tema nuevo a explorar: ¿qué es Europa y qué es para los americanos?

José Luis Romero, 1964¹

París está tan hecha a nuestra medida que si no existiera habría que inventarla para nosotros.

Damián Bayón, 1963²

Vea usted, en Buenos Aires ando a veces en un Renault y ustedes, los franceses, comen bananas de Brasil o manteca argentina. Los intercambios e cosas materiales van paralelos a los intercambios de las cosas imponderables del espíritu.

Antonio Berni, 1962³

Durante los años '60, cuando el ocaso de París era tema de discusión hasta para los franceses, los lazos de los intelectuales argentinos con la ciudad-luz se reconfiguraban. En 1964 José Luis Romero afirmaba que a partir de la crisis europea de posguerra la tradición occidental se superponía con los mundos industrial y socialista. Para un sudamericano, Europa comenzaba a “no ser más que Europa”⁴. Si las ideas mediaban la comprensión de la realidad y la acción sobre ésta –concepción que organizó la producción historiográfica de Romero–, analizar qué había sido en el pasado y qué representaba Europa en el presente resultaba crucial para comprender y redefinir las ideas (y realidades) asociadas a Latinoamérica. Como observa Omar Acha, en un historiador que se definía a sí mismo como medievalista como José Luis Romero, “el latinoamericanismo se torna deseo y realidad del quehacer intelectual”⁵. Hacia mediados de la década del '60, la idea de América Latina interpelaba a buena parte de los artistas e intelectuales.

Ese mismo año, en 1964, David Viñas publicó su libro *Literatura argentina y realidad política*⁶, dentro del cual el viaje a Europa constituye uno de los núcleos temáticos. En su recorrido histórico desde la colonia, señala una estetización del viaje europeo hacia fines del siglo XIX ligada al apogeo de la oligarquía liberal local. El viaje estético era para Viñas un viaje de clase y un traslado basado en una idealización de Europa que equiparaba a Sarmiento con Cortázar, aunque éste se declarara de izquierda. Desde su óptica, esta mirada hacia una Europa que equivalía a cultura sólo había sido superada –tal como indica Julio Schwartzman–

por León Rozitchner⁷. En 1961, su par del grupo Contorno había señalado los vínculos con los países centrales en términos de dependencia al desmenuzar las “características de la mirada europea y, en especial, la colonial y la de quienes siendo de aquí la adoptan”⁸.

En uno de los extremos de ese arco que barría la ‘idea de Europa’ se encontraba Damián Bayón⁹. Instalado en París desde 1949 para realizar estudios de historia del arte, a comienzos de los años ’60 Bayón solía referirse a los “argentinos de París” en términos de “exiliados voluntarios”. La ciudad-luz atraía a los argentinos desde el siglo XIX, pero desde la posguerra las familias de la alta burguesía porteña y los tangueros exitosos que habían poblado París eran reemplazados por profesionales de sectores medios, artistas e intelectuales¹⁰. Desde la óptica de Bayón, esos “exiliados voluntarios” eran casi más europeos que los franceses.

En una entrevista realizada poco después de ganar el Gran Premio de Grabado en la Bienal de Venecia de 1962, Antonio Berni trazaba un mapa en el que las distancias entre Europa y Sudamérica se contraían. Si vislumbraba los cambios (y las asimetrías) que la modernización traía en la vida cotidiana y en los contactos culturales transoceánicos, también percibió la oportunidad que el premio veneciano podía reportarle en cuanto a la circulación ampliada de su obra. En 1963, Berni instaló un estudio en la capital francesa donde pasó buena parte de los años que siguieron.

Otros intelectuales que vivían en el exterior reflexionaron sobre su condición de migrantes o tematizaron la extranjería en sus obras. Tal es el caso de Juan José Saer, emigrado a Francia en 1968; Luis Felipe Noé, instalado en Nueva York durante varios años; o del uruguayo Luis Camnitzer, quien trabajaba en los Estados Unidos desde 1964. En París desde 1962, Copi intentó definiciones de lo que era un ‘argentino de París’. Julio Le Parc hizo de la condición de extranjero una suerte de militancia latinoamericanista. ¿Qué particularidades tuvieron estos viajes intelectuales de los años ’60? ¿Cuáles fueron las imágenes cruzadas entre Europa y América Latina en este período? ¿De qué modo incidieron estas representaciones en la producción y la recepción de las obras de los artistas argentinos en Francia, y viceversa?

La iniciativa de probar suerte en París por parte de Le Parc, Berni, Nicolás García Urriburu, Lea Lublin, Antonio Seguí, Martha Boto o Copi, por nombrar sólo algunos, tuvo ciertos puntos en común con el viaje intelectual instaurado en el ámbito de las artes plásticas por jóvenes pintores y escultores durante la *belle époque*¹¹. Sin embargo, la estadía en Europa durante los años ’60 tuvo matices diferentes. No se trataba de aprendices que viajaban a la meca indiscutida de las artes para estudiar y trascendían a su regreso, sino de intelectuales y

artistas que habitaron como extranjeros la ciudad cosmopolita por antonomasia. Enterados de que Nueva York ya se había robado la idea de arte moderno (parafraseo aquí a Serge Guilbaut¹²), estos artistas fueron atraídos, sin duda, por lo que París implicaba en términos de tradición cultural y mercado artístico, pero esta ciudad también les fue significativa en términos políticos. Este aspecto estuvo mediado por cuestiones estéticas ligadas a la modernidad y la autonomía artística en tanto opuestas a unas estridencias norteamericanas, pero en algunos casos se acercó al entusiasmo tercermundista y anti-imperialista de la izquierda francesa.

Raymond Williams afirma que la conformación de metrópolis fue central a la configuración de la modernidad. ¿Cómo pensar, entonces, los viajes que emprendieron estos artistas en momentos de la crisis de esa modernidad?¹³ Podría aventurarse que si la conformación de esas metrópolis estuvo condicionada por el auge del colonialismo durante el siglo XIX, durante los años '60 la emergencia tanto del internacionalismo como del llamado Tercer Mundo hicieron imaginable una suerte de conquista simbólica de las capitales culturales por parte de intelectuales latinoamericanos.

Frente a la antinomia centro-periferia que cristalizaba con el discurso de la dependencia¹⁴, nos proponemos –siguiendo a Raúl Antelo y a Andrea Giunta¹⁵– analizar el espectro desplegado por estos sujetos migrantes. Nos resultan pertinentes, entonces, las hipótesis de James Clifford acerca de las prácticas de desplazamiento como “constitutivas de significados culturales y no su simple extensión o transferencia”¹⁶. La migración de intelectuales y producciones culturales entre París y Buenos Aires contribuyó a que se modularan representaciones de la cultura francesa, argentina y latinoamericana en un período marcado por la hegemonía norteamericana y la emergencia del llamado Tercer Mundo. Se ensayaron así mapas que abarcaron buena parte del arco de las ‘ideas’ de Europa y de Latinoamérica que Romero problematizaba en los años '60. Geografías que, por un lado, tenían a Nueva York como una presencia insoslayable y, a su vez, incorporaban a América Latina con una nueva visibilidad internacional tanto política como cultural.

Si pensamos en términos de migraciones, la idea del viaje toma un nuevo espesor y una connotación activa vinculada al trabajo desarrollado por el viajero, a la injerencia en el nuevo lugar y a la red vincular tendida por el migrante. En este sentido, es importante tener en cuenta que estas migraciones culturales estuvieron atravesadas por las tensiones ligadas a la extranjería de la lengua y la pertenencia de la imagen en tanto accesible a personas de hablas diversas. Por cuestiones de extensión, este artículo no pretende dar cuenta de los efectos estéticos de la extranjería, sino de las discusiones sobre la pertinencia del lugar para

estos artistas e intelectuales. Un lugar que era al mismo tiempo el punto geográfico donde se establecían, como un lugar de enunciación para sus discursos.

1. ‘Argentinos de París’ o intelectuales latinoamericanos en el extranjero

Durante los años ‘60, la emigración de intelectuales desde la Argentina aparecía para artistas, críticos y gestores culturales a la vez como un problema y una suerte de comprobación de la calidad del arte nacional. El número de pintores, escultores, escritores, músicos y diseñadores radicados fuera del país no cesaba de aumentar. En 1964, luego de un viaje por Latinoamérica para montar la exposición *The emergent decade*, Thomas Messer –director del Guggenheim Museum– le preguntaba a Samuel Paz por qué había tantos artistas argentinos en Nueva York, Roma o París¹⁷. Paz, subdirector del Centro de Artes Visuales del ITDT¹⁸, confirmaba la impresión de Messer acerca de la existencia de una suerte de diáspora argentina. Por diversas razones –explicaba– cuando los artistas alcanzaban un cierto punto en sus carreras sentían la necesidad de experimentar fuera de Buenos Aires. En primer lugar, una “crisis argentina permanente” hacía que muchos –artistas o no– buscaran mejores condiciones laborales en el extranjero. También había que tener en cuenta que la pintura cubista de Picasso o la de Mondrian no habían sido vistas en Buenos Aires sino en reproducciones. Finalmente –agregaba Paz– los argentinos deseaban medirse con otros artistas de reconocimiento internacional¹⁹.

Jorge Romero Brest justificaba este éxodo en función de la visibilidad. En un artículo de 1966, este propulsor de la internacionalización del arte argentino veía la diáspora con ambigüedad. Por un lado, hacía notar que los pintores de la Nueva Figuración vivían en el extranjero al igual que muchos otros. Destacaba también que una camada más joven parecía decidida a quedarse, “superando el complejo de inferioridad”²⁰. Desde su óptica, Buenos Aires prometía constituirse como un centro internacional de vanguardia²¹. Había un público local cada vez más numeroso para las producciones de avanzada y el mercado de arte se consolidaba, de modo que no parecía imprescindible que los artistas partieran. De cualquier manera, el crítico dejaba abierta la posibilidad de que también esos artistas más jóvenes migraran para hacer conocer su obra en el extranjero. En efecto, algunos de ellos emprendieron viaje ese mismo año. Pablo Mesejean y Delia Cancela partieron a París gracias al premio Braque de 1966²² y Marta Minujin se instaló en Nueva York con una beca Guggenheim.

Samuel Oliver, al frente del Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes desde 1963, veía este fenómeno como consecuencia de la falta de presupuesto oficial para engrosar el acervo del museo: “Argentina, por este motivo, exporta más pintores que futbolistas. Hay más de veinte pintores de línea que en este momento viven en el extranjero”²³. La cuestión del mercado y la marginalidad del campo artístico porteño en el mapa cultural internacional fue un motivo central para la partida de artistas e intelectuales pero, como indicaba Paz, no fue el único. La Argentina era –en palabras de Marina Franco– una sociedad expulsora desde mediados del siglo XX, cuando la tradición inmigratoria tendió a invertirse para dar lugar a una emigración constante de personas en búsqueda de mejores opciones económicas y profesionales. Este fenómeno, que en los años ‘60 se conoció como “fuga de cerebros”, fue amplio y abarcó salidas en las que convivieron motivos políticos, económicos y profesionales. La imposición de proyectos político-culturales durante el primer peronismo y la política represiva de Onganía a partir de junio de 1966 contribuyeron a propulsar una cantidad significativa de partidas de científicos e intelectuales²⁴.

Con el fin Segunda Guerra Mundial, los viajes intelectuales a Europa se reanudaron y París constituyó uno de los destinos más elegidos. Miguel Ocampo se trasladó allí hacia 1948 para perfeccionarse junto con Alicia Peñalba (que con los años en Francia pasó a ser Penalba, a falta del carácter ‘ñ’ en la letra de molde francesa). Damián Bayón lo hizo en compañía de Marta Traba en 1949. Lea Lublin pasó cinco años en París entre 1951 y 1956, Alberto Greco estuvo entre 1954 y 1956 con una beca del gobierno francés, Emilio Pettoruti se radicó en la ciudad-luz en 1953 y, entre fines de la década de los ’50 y mediados de la siguiente, una tanda más nutrida de artistas apostaron a probar suerte en la capital francesa. En orden de llegada: Luis Tomasello, Gyula Kosice, Julio Le Parc, Horacio García Rossi, Martha Boto, Gregorio Vardánega, Eduardo Jonquieres, Francisco Sobrino, Hugo Demarco, Armando Durante, Antonio Berni, Antonio Seguí, Rómulo Macció, Lea Lublin nuevamente, Nicolás García Urriburu, Juan Stoppani, Delia Cancela y Pablo Mesejean, entre otros²⁵.

Estos migrantes culturales vivieron en París en el contexto de un flujo internacional de bienes culturales muy diferente de aquel de comienzos del siglo XX. Por un lado, la circulación de imágenes y exhibiciones de arte se multiplicaba y el consumo cultural crecía de modo inédito en ambos márgenes del océano²⁶; por otro lado, las distancias que separaban Viejo y Nuevo mundo ya no se medían en largos meses de barco; se contraían a cuestión de horas gracias a los vuelos comerciales o, incluso, de segundos por medio de las nuevas tecnologías de comunicación. En este sentido, el viaje a Europa había perdido el halo de epopeya y, si bien planteaba desafíos diversos a los migrantes y modificaba el panorama

cultural de una metrópoli como París, la presencia de los argentinos en la ciudad-luz no confrontaba a los franceses con una otredad radical²⁷.

Según Andrea Giunta, la exposición *Magnet: New York*, realizada en 1964 en la sede neoyorkina de la galería Bonino, probaba que los artistas latinoamericanos habían comprendido que el nuevo centro de arte moderno estaba en esa ciudad²⁸. Sin embargo, la presencia de artistas argentinos y latinoamericanos en París no mermó de modo significativo. En 1962, parte de esta comunidad creó la *Association Latino-Américaine de Paris* cuya primera exhibición reunió obras de 138 artistas residentes en esa ciudad²⁹. Tres años más tarde otra exposición organizada por esta asociación fue tan populosa como la primera³⁰. En el caso de los argentinos, las proporciones fueron similares: en 1962 Germaine Derbecq había reunido *30 Argentins de la nouvelle génération* en la galería Creuze³¹ y en 1967 Bayón afirmaba que éstos sumaban unos cuarenta³². Superpuesta con una colectividad latinoamericana más amplia, durante los años '60 hubo una comunidad argentina en París, que se definió a sí misma y fue vista desde Buenos Aires como los “argentinos de París”. Intentaremos echar luz sobre el sentido de elegir esa ciudad y analizar las implicaciones tuvo para un intelectual vivir en el exterior durante la década en que América Latina parecía emerger en la escena internacional.

La identificación latinoamericana de los argentinos se combinó, según los casos, con la procedencia de una metrópoli sudamericana como la modernizada Buenos Aires de los años '60, con la propia ascendencia italiana, española o francesa, y con los vínculos establecidos con la cultura europea. Juan José Saer señala un paralelo entre argentinos y parisinos que contribuye a echar luz sobre las tensiones que supuso compatibilizar ciertos rasgos nacionales con una identificación latinoamericana en París.

El viejo chiste de proponer un buen negocio consistente en comprar un hombre engreído por lo que vale y venderlo por lo que él cree que vale que en Europa pretende describir a los franceses, se aplica en América Latina a los argentinos. Una interpretación sociológica me parece válida para explicar esta caricatura: antes que los otros países de América latina, la Argentina conoció un período de prosperidad que trajo aparejada una fuerte concentración urbana, y por ende un *modernismo* indudable (a principios de siglo) lo que creó una especie de antagonismo ciudad-campo con otras regiones menos desarrolladas del continente.³³

El mismo chiste se puede aplicar dentro de la Argentina, entre porteños y provincianos. Tal es así que Antonio Seguí afirma, un poco en broma y un poco en serio, “Yo prefiero ser latinoamericano en París que cordobés en Buenos Aires”³⁴. *L'Internationale Argentine* de Copi ofrece una imagen caricaturizada de los “argentinos de París”, es decir distorsionada en

algunos aspectos pero no falta de verosimilitud. La organización ficticia que da nombre al libro se propone “coordinar las acciones en que participan de manera desordenada todos los argentinos que viven en el extranjero”. En la ficción, luego de ser convocado para recibir una beca del creador de la Internacional Argentina, Nicanor Sigampa, el personaje de Copi comparte una mesa de bar con un grupo de personas entre las que se encuentran un cónsul y una periodista francesa.

Una periodista francesa, especializada en reportajes sobre las falsas glorias de la literatura hispanoamericana, se colgaba del brazo de un cónsul, un escritor, naturalmente, que soñaba con ser editado en París. [...] En tono confidencial, me dijo:

- Estoy escribiendo un artículo sobre los argentinos de París.

Solía consagrarme dos o tres al año, casi todos idénticos, que hacía aparecer en diversas revistas. Los argentinos de París no eran muy numerosos y generalmente se les dedicaban artículos colectivos, como si pertenecieran a un mismo movimiento artístico. En el fondo, no es raro que haya tipos como Nicanor Sigampa, que inventen una Internacional Argentina, ya que la prensa francesa es la primera que cree en ello. Ciertamente que los argentinos que desembarcan en París se asocian de buena gana entre sí para crear compañías de teatro o escuelas de pintura, pero en cuanto tienen la ocasión echan a volar por cuenta propia y hacen lo posible por desmarcarse. Todos están al corriente de los hechos y gestas de los demás miembros de la colonia, y se acusan entre sí de robarse las ideas.³⁵

Saturado de la locura de sus connacionales, el Copi de la ficción escapa a Buenos Aires: “¡En París hay demasiados argentinos!”³⁶. Fuera de la novela, Copi definió este gentilicio mestizo del siguiente modo:

Mi padre era lo que se llama un argentino de París, es decir, una persona absolutamente asimilada: hablaba francés corrientemente y era artista plástico. Y yo he sido siempre un argentino de París. Es decir que hablo como los franceses, me visto como ellos y tengo probablemente los mismos puntos de vista respecto de las autopistas o al precio del pescado. Pero de todas maneras, no soy un francés, pertenezco a una categoría de extranjeros que los franceses consideran como tales durante dos generaciones.³⁷

Como indica Adrián Gorelik, el carácter europeo de Buenos Aires asumió la estatura de un mito y sustentó la convicción acerca de su excepcionalidad en el contexto latinoamericano. La representación de Buenos Aires como la ciudad más europea del continente, que se formuló entre 1910 y los años '30 y cristalizó hacia los años '50, fue razón tanto para exaltarla como para repudiarla³⁸. El arco que barrió la imagen del “argentino de París” estuvo contenido entre esos dos polos: podía ser casi una tautología como ‘europeo de

Europa' o equivaler a 'Latinoamericano en París', un argentino que con la perspectiva distanciada descubría su pertenencia regional.

Uno de los artistas argentinos que reflexionó sobre la responsabilidad de residir en el exterior fue Luis F. Noé (1933). Instalado por segunda vez en Nueva York desde 1965, Noé intentó pasar en limpio los motivos y las consecuencias de migrar en un artículo escrito desde el extranjero que no se refería al caso argentino en particular sino que ampliaba la perspectiva a Latinoamérica.

La cuestión no reside en *estar* o no en el país de origen sino en no desarraigarse, actuando con independencia cultural, tratando de favorecer nuestro mecanismo creador y las condiciones en que se realiza el arte en nuestro países. [...] Hasta los muralistas mexicanos necesitaron de la perspectiva europea para tomar conciencia de sí mismos. Por esto también se justifica toda una generación de artistas nuestros, que, si bien estuvo ligada a Europa, ayudó a modernizar nuestro arte. Sin embargo, con este proceso comenzó también la falta de nuestro arte contemporáneo: su dependencia.³⁹

La opción por los Estados Unidos tenía un sentido específico. En una entrevista de 1968, Noé explicaba: “me preguntaron por qué vivía en Nueva York; yo contesté algo absurdo y pedante: porque estoy en contexto, por lo mismo que Marx estuvo en Londres”⁴⁰. Además, el medio cultural norteamericano aportaba –desde su óptica– un componente nacional fundamental para dar forma a las escenas culturales latinoamericanas y dejar atrás el consumo de una cultura “afrancesada”, esto es universal. La sociedad norteamericana se había “autoinventado” y utilizaba como bandera su *American way of life* que se traducían tanto en la iconografía del Pop como en la retórica industrial del Minimal. Ahora bien, en plena “fuga de cerebros” contribuir a la formación de un suelo cultural local se presentaba en términos de una hazaña cuyo riesgo era la total invisibilidad internacional.

Noé publicó este artículo en 1966, el mismo año en que Julio Le Parc obtuvo el Gran Premio de Pintura en la Bienal de Venecia. A contrapelo de la crítica y las instituciones locales, Noé afirmaba que ese premio no representaba un reconocimiento del arte argentino sino de la Escuela de París⁴¹. Sin embargo, para otros actores culturales latinoamericanos, como el peruano Juan Acha, el constructivismo en general y el arte cinético en particular no sólo realizaban aportes significativos a la cultura universal con sus exploraciones de la visualidad, sino que habían contribuido además a evitar ciertos lugares comunes referidos al arte de América Latina. Si Noé postulaba el caos como la estructura que diferenciaba a Latinoamérica⁴², Acha estaba con aquellos que entendían que la asociación con componentes irracionales formaba parte de un folklore a desterrar⁴³. Por su parte, Bayón reivindicaba a

París (junto con Buenos Aires) como lugar de origen de una nueva figuración que contaba también con Antonio Seguí, instalado en Francia desde 1963⁴⁴.

La rivalidad entre las dos capitales internacionales atravesaba el discurso de los artistas y críticos argentinos. El caso de Le Parc aporta matices interesantes. Si a comienzos de los años '60 tenía una apreciación positiva de Nueva York, ésta se desdibujó en momentos del anti-americanismo más rabioso de fines de la década. En torno de la elección democrática y el derrocamiento de Allende en Chile, buena parte de los artistas que nos ocupan se sintieron interpelados por los discursos latinoamericanistas y utilizaron iconografías y referencias más directas a la pobreza, la violencia o la radicalización política del continente. En este contexto, la residencia en el extranjero resultó más problemática.

En una entrevista que el uruguayo Luis Camnitzer (1937) le hizo a comienzos de los años '70, Le Parc hipotetizaba que de no haber elegido el arte como oficio (que en su caso equivalía a migrar), probablemente hubiera sido un “revolucionario profesional”⁴⁵. Esta serie de preguntas y respuestas entre estos dos artistas era una suerte de ejercicio para dilucidar los problemas que vivir en el extranjero planteaba a un artista interesado en incidir en la realidad de su lugar de origen. Así, antes de comenzar con las preguntas Camnitzer aclaraba:

La primer respuesta que nos damos todos, como razón de nuestro alejamiento, es la perspectiva y la ‘lucidez’ que esa lejanía nos da. Hay que estar fuera del agua para saber qué es estar mojado. Pero durante ese lapso de estar afuera, adentro siguen sucediendo cosas, y al no vivir esas cosas, uno no solamente se enajena sino que también pierde el derecho de usar esa posible ‘lucidez’ adquirida durante ese mismo tiempo. Uno corre el peligro de terminar con toneladas de ‘lucidez’ pero sin posibilidades de aplicarla.⁴⁶

Le Parc argumentaba que en el ámbito cultural podían desarrollarse “otras luchas, anónimas, de contra-información”⁴⁷. El artista hacía mención del boicot en 1967 a la exposición inaugural del *Center for the Inter-American Relations* por parte de un grupo de artistas latinoamericanos radicados en Nueva York⁴⁸. También se refería al boicot internacional a la Bienal de San Pablo de 1969, una denuncia del régimen militar brasileño que había dejado semi-desnuda a la décima edición del evento artístico más prestigioso de Latinoamérica⁴⁹. Entre las posibilidades de contra-información contaba la exhibición *Amérique Latine Non-Officicelle* organizada en París en 1970 por un colectivo anónimo de artistas entre los cuales estaba Le Parc, interesado en hacer ver informaciones e imágenes fuera del registro turístico.

El *New York Graphic Workshop* (NYGW) desmontaba la imagen del grabado latinoamericano en tanto folklorizante, una imagen sostenida por el programa cultural oficial de los Estados Unidos desde los años '40⁵⁰. Por el contrario, Francia no contaba con instituciones ni políticas que, como el MoMa primero y el CIAR más tarde, orientaran la visibilidad de la cultura latinoamericana⁵¹. En este sentido, devolver a América Latina un aspecto particular y denunciar su situación social y política fueron parte del mismo programa para Le Parc. El conceptualismo era más apto que el cinetismo para poner en evidencia pertenencias regionales sin abandonar la producción de arte. La exhibición *Amérique Latine Non-Officicelle*, en cambio, dejó a un lado la cuestión de lo artístico. Ante la urgencia de las luchas contra el imperialismo, ser panfletario constituía un imperativo.

La opción por la ciudad-luz tuvo ciertas implicaciones en términos políticos para estos artistas. Y si esto no fue así desde su llegada, al calor del proceso de politización tanto en Francia como en América Latina, ser latinoamericano en París implicó cada vez más tomar parte de la resistencia cultural al imperialismo. Este imperativo no reemplazó a la búsqueda de consagración artística, sino que la crítica institucional y la denuncia tercermundista se alternaron y se superpusieron –no sin tensiones– con el deseo de los artistas argentinos de hacerse un lugar en el mundo. París fue, en este sentido, una suerte de contracara de Nueva York: una opción menos estridente, más modernista y connotada políticamente⁵². El viaje y la residencia en el extranjero contribuyeron al proceso de profesionalización de los artistas visuales, un proceso que también se constituyó tanto en términos de crítica institucional como de denuncia social.

A comienzos de los años '70 y en torno de la elección democrática y el derrocamiento de Allende en Chile, buena parte de los artistas que nos ocupan se sintieron interpelados por los discursos latinoamericanistas y utilizaron iconografías y referencias más directas a la pobreza, la violencia o la radicalización política del continente. En este contexto, la residencia en el extranjero resultó aun más problemática. En 1972, Berni se encargaba de aclarar en cada nota periodística que su residencia (y su compromiso) estaba en Buenos Aires y no en París. Por su parte, sin abandonar el lugar ganado dentro de la República de las Artes, Le Parc buscó maneras de contribuir desde las artes visuales a la concientización política en general y a la denuncia del subdesarrollo latinoamericano en particular.

Durante esos años, la circulación de íconos latinoamericanos llegó a tal punto en Francia que la *Coopérative des Malassis* ironizaba en obras como *L'Appartemensonge* (1971) con la moda castrista difundida entre los intelectuales franceses, a quienes tildaban de “*revolutionnaires de chambre*”⁵³. Los artistas argentinos también se apropiaron del Tercer

Mundo en tanto repertorio iconográfico no sólo para la producción de afiches sino también de pinturas y obras en otros soportes de circulación más restringida. Así como la guerra de Vietnam se constituyó como un emblema del anti-imperialismo y sus imágenes aparecieron, por ejemplo, en las pinturas de Erró, Latinoamérica conformó un núcleo temático para buena parte de los artistas argentinos de París. Ese conjunto de producciones visuales conforma una suerte de amalgama heterogénea de imágenes en distintos soportes y con diversas redes de circulación.

Frente a imágenes vagas y exotizantes, o ante el uso exclusivo de íconos del tercermundismo para identificar a la región, buena parte de los artistas argentinos de París buscaron otras representaciones de América Latina. Imágenes que dieran cuenta o bien de su situación económica y política, o bien que se distanciaran de los *clichés* asociados al continente. En algunos casos, también hicieron un uso irónico de esos motivos típicos y lugares comunes. Luego de *Amérique Latine non-officielle*, una exhibición montada en la ciudad universitaria de París durante abril de 1970, Le Parc artista formó parte de la organización de otras dos exposiciones colectivas orientadas a poner a la vista una ‘América Latina no oficial’. La iconografía de García Urriburu también aludió al subcontinente en general y a la pampa en particular. La vaca y el mapa de Sudamérica aparecen como motivos recurrentes en su obra desde mediados de los años ’60. En este sentido, Latinoamérica operó como una figura clave en la oposición civilización-naturaleza en el que este artista inscribía su obra. Hacia 1969 Seguí realizó una serie de pinturas que representaban paisajes de la provincia de Córdoba, su lugar de origen. Con una retórica más intimista, algunas de estas telas recrean postales turísticas. Otras muestran paisajes indefinidos que sólo pueden identificarse a partir de su título. Por su parte, Copi ironizó en algunas de sus historietas con el imaginario desplegado alrededor de la Amazonia como lugar utópico. Sus personajes desarrollaban allí una sexualidad liberada de las convenciones occidentales (y cristianas)⁵⁴.

Si los encuentros de artistas latinoamericanos de La Habana y Santiago de Chile realizados en 1972 fueron una suerte de caldera donde se discutía la idea de un arte revolucionario para Latinoamérica⁵⁵, el París post-mayo constituyó uno de los lugares privilegiados de visibilidad internacional para imágenes de inspiración regional. La comunidad argentina y latinoamericana tenía unos diez años de actividad más o menos conjunta y contaba con algunos notables como Cortázar o Le Parc que se comprometieron con la ‘causa latinoamericana’.

James Clifford advierte que la paradoja que da fuerza a una diáspora es que “residir *aquí* supone solidaridad y conexión *allá*. Pero *allá* no es necesariamente un solo lugar o una

nación exclusiva”⁵⁶. Para este antropólogo, una pregunta central respecto de la conformación de sujetos diaspóricos es, entonces, “¿Cómo se recuerda y rearticula la conexión (en otra parte) que establece una diferencia (aquí)?”⁵⁷. Clifford señala algunos casos de lo que denomina “estructuración negativa de redes diaspóricas”: una identificación magrebí una a argelinos, marroquíes y tunecinos residentes en Francia, pues una historia común de explotación colonial y neo-colonial contribuye a formar nuevas solidaridades; de modo similar, hacia 1970 se formaron en Gran Bretaña alianzas antirracistas entre inmigrantes sudasiáticos, afro-caribeños y africanos en contra del término excluyente “negro”⁵⁸. No es posible afirmar que los intelectuales argentinos residentes en París fueran víctimas de discriminaciones raciales o sociales⁵⁹. Sin embargo, sus casos tienen ciertos puntos en común con los planteados por Clifford: entre fines de los años ’60 y comienzos de los ’70, buena parte de los artistas que nos ocupan se sintieron interpelados por los discursos latinoamericanistas y rearticulaban su producción y sus actividades en relación con estos tópicos. Si bien no se abocaron con exclusividad a recrear imágenes para la región, sí dieron visibilidad a ciertos aspectos significativos de América Latina por medio de exposiciones, mapas, paisajes y elementos iconográficos diversos.

¹ José Luis Romero, “L’Amérique latine et l’idée d’Europe”, *Diogène. Revue internationale des sciences humaines* n. 47, Paris, juillet-septembre 1964, p. 82-88.

² Damián Bayón, “Nosotros los exiliados voluntarios”, *Atlántida* año 46 n. 1157, julio 1963, p. 88.

³ M.T. Maugis, “Un quart d’heure avec... Antonio Berni”, *Les Lettres Françaises* n. 941, 30/8/1962. Archivo Berni, Fundación Espigas.

⁴ José Luis Romero, *art. cit.*, p. 88.

⁵ Omar Acha, “Latinoamérica en la obra de José Luis Romero: entre la historia y el ensayo”, ponencia presentada en las Jornadas Internacionales *José Luis Romero*, Universidad Nacional de San Martín, 31 de marzo al 3 de abril de 2009, mimeo. Mi gratitud al autor por facilitarme su trabajo aún inédito.

⁶ David Viñas, *Literatura argentina y realidad política: de Sarmiento a Cortázar*. Buenos Aires, Jorge Alvarez, 1964.

⁷ Julio Schwartzman, “David Viñas: la crítica como epopeya”, en Susana Cella (dir.), *Historia crítica de la literatura argentina 10. La irrupción de la crítica*. Buenos Aires, Emecé, 1999, pp. 147-180.

⁸ David Viñas, “La mirada a Europa: del viaje colonial al viaje estético”, en *Literatura argentina y política I. De los jacobinos porteños a la bohemia anarquista*. Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1995, p. 66.

⁹ Bayón fue uno de los discípulos de Romero Brest que colaboraron con *Ver y Estimar* desde su creación en 1948. Véase Andrea Giunta y Laura Malosetti Costa (dir.), *Arte de posguerra. Jorge Romero Brest y la revista Ver y Estimar*. Buenos Aires, Paidós, 2005.

¹⁰ Sobre el perfil y los diferentes grupos de ‘argentinos de París’ desde fines del siglo XIX hasta el período de entreguerras véase Paulo Cavaleri, “Argentinos en París”, *Todo es historia* n. 353, diciembre de 1996, pp. 8-26; y Paulette Patout, “La cultura latinoamericana en París entre 1910 y 1936”, en *1899/1999. Vida, obra y herencia de Miguel Ángel Asturias*. París, UNESCO, 1999, pp. 210-221.

¹¹ Laura Malosetti Costa, “Artistas viajeros en la *Belle Époque*”, en *Cuadros de viaje, artistas argentinos en Europa y Estados Unidos (1880-1910)*. Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2009, pp. 13-49.

¹² Serge Guilbaut, *De cómo Nueva York robó la idea de arte moderno* (1983). Madrid, Mondadori, 1990.

¹³ Raymond Williams, *La política del modernismo* (1989). Buenos Aires, Manantial, 1997.

¹⁴ Véanse Oscar Terán, *Nuestros años sesenta* (1991). Buenos Aires, El cielo por asalto, 1993; y Jorge Panesi, “La crítica argentina y el discurso de la dependencia”, *Filología*, año XX, 1985, pp. 171-195.

¹⁵ Intervención de Raúl Antelo en la mesa “Globalización y Cultura: ¿Existe un lugar latinoamericano?”, Simposio *Desafíos que plantea la globalización en las artes visuales*, Universidad Nacional de Tres de febrero, Buenos Aires 26 al 29 de agosto de 2008. Andrea Giunta, “Extranjería y nuevas pertenencias en las artes visuales”, en Néstor García Canclini (comp.), *Extranjeros en la tecnología y en la cultura*. Buenos Aires, Fundación Telefónica– Ariel, 2009, pp. 39-50.

¹⁶ James Clifford, *Itinerarios transculturales* (1997). Barcelona, Gedisa, 1999, p. 13.

¹⁷ Carta de Samuel Paz a Thomas Messer 3/5/1965, en *The emergent decade*. New York, Guggenheim Museum, 1966, s/p.

¹⁸ Samuel Paz acompañó a Romero Brest desde la temprana posguerra. Formó parte del comité de redacción de la revista *Ver y Estimar* entre 1952 y 1955, integró el equipo del Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes entre 1955 y 1962, cuando asumió como Director Adjunto del Centro de Artes Visuales del IDTD hasta 1969. A continuación, durante la gestión de Samuel Oliver al frente del MNBA, Paz se desempeñó como curador en esa institución entre 1972 y 1980. Victoria Noorthoorn, “Despedida a Samuel Paz”, *Arte al día* n. 144, mayo de 2007. www.artaaldiaonline.com.ar.

¹⁹ Dentro del panorama del arte argentino, el catálogo de la exposición incluía un apartado titulado “Expatriates: New York” con una serie de artistas latinoamericanos radicados en esa ciudad: Kasuya Sakai, Marcelo Bonevardi, Sarah Grilo, Fernández Muro y Noé, entre los argentinos; de Chile, Nemesio Antúnez, Enrique Castro-Cid y Guillermo Nuñez; María Pacheco de Bolivia, Armando Morales de Nicaragua y Fernando Botero de Colombia, entre otros.

²⁰ Jorge Romero Brest (1966) citado en Luis F. Noé, “Responsabilidad del artista que se va de América Latina y del que se queda” (1966), *Noescritos sobre lo que se llama arte*. Buenos Aires, Adriana Hidalgo, 2007, pp. 253-254.

²¹ Andrea Giunta, *Vanguardia, internacionalismo y política. Arte argentino en los sesenta*. Buenos Aires, Paidós, 2001.

²² Mariana Marchesi, “Cancela/Mesejean”, en Edgardo Giménez (ed.), *Jorge Romero Brest. La cultura como provocación*. Buenos Aires, 2006, pp. 368-369.

²³ “Las penurias del Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes. Un tesoro sin recursos”, *Así*, 5/1/1973. Archivos Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes.

²⁴ Entre 1960 y 1970 se calcula que se fueron del país 128.217 personas y entre 1970 y 1980, 236.138. Marina Franco, *El exilio. Argentinos en Francia durante la dictadura*. Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI, 2008. Véase también Alfredo E. Lattes y Enrique Oteiza (coord.), *Dinámica migratoria argentina (1955-1984). Democratización y retorno de expatriados*. Buenos Aires, Centro Editor de América Latina, 1987.

²⁵ Entre los más inquietos se encuentra Alberto Greco, quien luego de su primera estadía parisina entre 1954 y 1956, pasó un año en Brasil, otros dos en Buenos Aires, y partió otra vez a París en 1961. En 1963 se trasladó a España, donde murió dos años más tarde. “Biografía”; en *Greco*. Buenos Aires, MNBA, 1992, pp. 261-264.

²⁶ Sobre el crecimiento económico y de los sectores medios franceses, véase Serge Berstein, *La France de l'expansion. La République gaullienne (1958-1969)*. Paris, Seuil, 1989. En cuanto al auge de los medios masivos de comunicación, véase Herman Lebovics, *La misión Malraux. Salvar la cultura francesa de las fábricas de sueños*. Buenos Aires, Eudeba, 2000. Sobre el impacto cultural de la modernización francesa, véase Kristin Ross, *Fast cars, clean bodies: decolonization and reordering of French culture*. MIT Press, 1995. Sobre el crecimiento del mercado de arte en Francia, Raymonde Moulin, *Le marché de la peinture en France*, Paris, Minuit, 1967. Para el caso argentino, véanse Luis Alberto Romero, *Historia contemporánea de la Argentina*. Buenos Aires, FCE, 1994; Carlos Altamirano, “Desarrollo y desarrollistas”, *Prismas* n. 2, 1998, pp. 75-94; Ricardo Aroskind, “El país del desarrollo posible”, en Daniel James (dir.), *Nueva Historia Argentina. Violencia, proscripción y autoritarismo (1955-1976)*, Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 2003, pp. 65-116; y Gonzalo Aguilar, “Televisión y vida privada”, en Fernando Devoto y Marta Madero (dir.), *Historia de la vida privada en Argentina. La Argentina entre multitudes y soledades. De los años treinta a la actualidad*. Buenos Aires, Taurus, 1999, pp. 255-283.

²⁷ Renato Ortiz analiza los sentidos del viaje en momentos de la globalización. Buena parte de los cambios que señala se iniciaron a comienzos del siglo XX y se intensificaron en los años '60 con el desarrollo de las industrias culturales. Renato Ortiz, “El viaje, lo popular y lo otro”, *Otro territorio. Ensayos sobre el mundo contemporáneo*. Buenos Aires, Universidad de Quilmes, 1996, p. 39-40.

²⁸ Andrea Giunta, *Vanguardia, internacionalismo y política...*, op. cit., p. 319.

²⁹Entre ellos Marta Minujín, Hervé Télémaque, León Ferrari, Jorge de La Vega, Ernesto Deira, Luis Felipe Noé, Cisero Dias, Eduardo Jonquières, Wifredo Lam, Roberto Matta, Frans Krajceberg, Alberto Greco, Artur Piza, Sergio Camargo, Luis Tomasello, Francisco Sobrino, Francisco Toledo, Rufino Tamayo, Julio Le Parc, Jesús Rafael Soto, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Martha Boto, Gregorio Vardánega. *Exposition d'Art Latino-Américain à Paris*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2 août – 4 octobre 1962.

³⁰El catálogo incluye 127 artistas. *Artistes latino-américains de Paris*. Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, juin 1965. Un artículo de la prensa afirma que fueron 132 artistas. L. Molinari Flores, “Carta de París. Exposición de latinoamericanos”, *Caballero* n. 27 agosto 1965, p. 2.

³¹Realizada entre el 9 de febrero y el 1° de marzo de 1962 en la galería Creuze.

³²Damián Bayón, “Del Plata al Sena”, *Americas*, Unión Panamericana, septiembre de 1967.

³³Juan José Saer, *El río sin orillas* (1991). Buenos Aires, Seix Barral, 2006, p. 167.

³⁴A comienzos de la década del '60 Seguí se instaló en Buenos Aires pero no le resultó una experiencia positiva. Entrevista a Antonio Seguí, en Ana Borón, Mario del Carril y Albino Gómez, *Porqué se fueron*. Buenos Aires. Emecé, 1995, p. 165.

³⁵Copi, *La Internacional argentina*. (1988). Barcelona, Anagrama, 1989, pp. 20-21.

³⁶Copi, *La Internacional argentina*. (1988). Barcelona, Anagrama, 1989, pp. 20-21.

³⁷“Un argentino de París. Entrevista de Raquel Lineberg”, en José Tchekaski, *Habla Copi. Homosexualidad y creación*. Buenos Aires, Galerna, 1998, p. 113.

³⁸Adrián Gorelik, “¿Buenos Aires europea?”, en *Miradas sobre Buenos Aires. Historia cultural y crítica urbana*. Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI, 2004, pp. 71-94.

³⁹Luis F. Noé, “Responsabilidad del artista que se va de América Latina y del que se queda”, *art. cit.*, pp. 254-255.

⁴⁰“Luis Felipe Noé, creador de la bandera”, *Primera Plana* n. 304 22/10/68, p. 93.

⁴¹La tensión entre lo nacional y lo universal en el caso de Le Parc y del cinetismo es abordada en el capítulo 3 de Isabel Plante, *Consagración de las producciones visuales y crítica institucional entre Buenos Aires y París durante los años '60 (1962-1973)*. Tesis de doctorado, FFyL-UBA, 2009. Mimeo.

⁴²Cfr. Luis F. Noé, *La antiestética* (1965), Buenos Aires, Ediciones La Flor, 1988.

⁴³Estas dos líneas fueron discutidas por la crítica latinoamericana aun durante la década siguiente. Sobre Acha véase Fabiana Serviddio, “Capítulo 2. Ciencia como utopía del arte: Juan Acha”, *Entre EE.UU. y América latina: Arte latinoamericano y discurso crítico durante la década del setenta*. Universidad de Buenos Aires, Facultad de Filosofía y letras, tesis de doctorado, 2007, mimeo.

⁴⁴Damián Bayón, *Aventura plástica de Hispanoamérica. Pintura, cinetismo, artes de la acción (1940-1972)*. México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1974, p. 255.

⁴⁵Luis Camnitzer, “Entrevista a Le Parc”, [c. 1970], 4 pp. mecanografiadas, p. 1. Archivo Le Parc.

⁴⁶*Idem*.

⁴⁷*Idem*.

⁴⁸Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation*. Austin, University of Texas Press, 2007, pp. 240-241.

⁴⁹Véase Isobel Whitelegg, “Biennales contra Biennales”, Association of Art Historians (AAH) Annual Conference. Tate, London, abril 2008, mimeo.

⁵⁰Véase por ejemplo Fabiana Serviddio, “Muestras latinoamericanas durante la Segunda Guerra: la exhibición como articulación de la identidad”, *Segundas Jornadas sobre exposiciones de arte argentino y latinoamericano. Curaduría, diseño y políticas culturales*. 3, 4 y 5 de septiembre de 2009, *Ciudad de las Artes*, Córdoba, mimeo.

⁵¹Lo más cercano fue la *Maison de l'Amérique Latine*, creada en 1945, pero si bien esta entidad de orden diplomático organizaba exposiciones, éstas o tenían gran proyección en el campo artístico.

⁵²La presencia latinoamericana en Nueva York data de los años '20, pero se intensificó a lo largo de los años '60 y '70. Véanse Eva Cockcroft, “The United States and Socially Concerned Latin American Art: 1920-1970”, en AA.VV., *The Latin American spirit: art and artists in the United States, 1920-1970*. New York, The Bronx Museum of the Arts – Harry N. Abrams Inc. Publishers, 1988, pp. 184-221; y Jacqueline Barnitz et al., *Latin American Artists in New York since 1970*. Austin, University of Texas Press, 2001.

⁵³Una pintura en cuarenta paneles presentada en el *Salon de la Jeune Peinture* de 1971. La *Coopérative des Malassis* fue una agrupación conformada en 1970 por artistas ligados a la Figuración Narrativa, luego del *Salon de la Jeune Peinture* titulado *Culture et Police II*: Henri Cueco, Lucien Fleury, Jean-Claude Latil, Michel Parré, Gérard Tisserand y Christian Zeimert.

⁵⁴He analizado con mayor detalle esta serie de obras y exposiciones en el capítulo 6 de Isabel Plante, *Consagración artística y crítica institucional entre París y Buenos Aires...*, *op cit*.

⁵⁵Cfr. Mariana Marchesi, “Las redes culturales latinoamericanas y los debates del arte revolucionario (1970-1973)”, *Arte Latinoamericano Transnacional. Foro internacional de investigación para estudiantes de doctorado e investigadores emergentes*. Universidad de Texas, Austin, 6 – 7 de noviembre de 2009, mimeo.

⁵⁶ James Clifford, *op. cit.*, p. 325.

⁵⁷ *Idem.*

⁵⁸ Avtar Brah citado James Clifford, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

⁵⁹ Los testimonios de una buena cantidad de exiliados políticos en Francia recogidos por Marina Franco van en el mismo sentido.

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Paris-Buenos Aires, and return: an international path for abstract and kinetic art

During the 1940-1960 period, a profound cultural synergy between Latin America and Europe plays a prominent role in driving the transition from geometrical abstraction to kinetic art. Paradigmatic in this respect is the relationship between Argentina and France, two of the major international cultural catalysts of that period: Buenos-Aires is the centre of the international *rioplatense* community, while Paris is at the crossroad of a wide European cultural cross-contamination.

The contribution of “Parisian” culture is essential in the development of abstract art on the Rio de la Plata around the 1940s, and critics have often emphasized its importance in the process of modernisation of South American art. However, such relationship should be analysed in both directions: indeed, the knowledge and assimilation of French experiences in Buenos Aires is a prelude to the original contribution of young Argentinean artists in Paris during the ‘50s and ‘60s.

Based on this assumption, this paper analyses the way in which the “Parisian” heritage is quickly integrated and developed by Argentinean artists, giving birth to new and original languages, typical of the *rioplatense* abstract avant-gardes. The introduction of cutted shapes, the non conventional use of plane and round surfaces, the experimental use of materials, playfulness and call to participation of public represent the first coherent and influential contributions of Latin America to the international geometrical and constructive abstract art, opening the way to a new way of thinking about the articulation of time, space and movement, a fundamental principle of kinetic art.

Cecilia Braschi

Paris-Buenos Aires, and return: An international path for abstract and kinetic art

The topic of this research stems from two parallel considerations. Firstly, the constant presence and important role played by many Argentinean and Uruguayan artists in abstract constructive art trends between 1944 and 1968. Secondly, the strong synergic relationship between these artists and Paris, which helped to pave the way to a further development of this international movement. This fertile conjuncture is noticeable since the first South American theory on geometrical abstract art by Torres García in the 40s (reanimating the ideas of the Parisian Cercle et Carré group) up until the experience of the Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel, in Paris, between 1961 and 1968, gathering Argentinean and French young artists.

It is necessary to challenge an old but strongly rooted European stereotype, which attributes to Latin American culture a surreal and fantastic aesthetics and iconography, and which considers construction, rationality and geometry as a prerogative of European (“Cartesian”) culture¹. Contrary to such a dichotomy, the abstract art movements of Rio de la Plata have been characterised by a constructive, positivist and engaged intentionality. This dates from the post World War II period - a crucial moment in which Argentina and Uruguay tried to break away from their past colonial heritage and to participate as independent and sovereign states within a new and modern international order. Then, Cubism, Purism, Suprematism, and -above all- Neoplasticism and Constructivism represented new artistic languages, which were able to conjugate technological improvement and desire for social and political renewal.

While French critics often underline the importance of such a dialogue as an opportunity for South American artists to open and modernize their culture², South American artists lament the lack of recognition of South American artists in the development of abstract and kinetic art³. In fact, the real issue is not to establish the paternity or the priority of discoveries and experiences between Europe and South America. Rather, it is to underline the importance, and even the necessity, of synergy between those local contributions that grew into a wider movement, which was, by definition, international.

Paris and Buenos Aires are two symptomatic towns exactly because of their internationalism and desires of cosmopolitanism. Paris has been, since the beginning of the century, the “historic” international capital welcoming exiles from wars and authoritarian regimes, and hosting a productive and durable cultural syncretism. Buenos Aires, on the other hand, has been probably the south American capital most strongly populated by European immigration, particularly sensitive to European culture, but also aware of its Latin American heritage.

Paris, seen from Buenos Aires

Since the beginning of the century, Argentinean artists have been very well informed about European art, especially French art. Indeed, French culture was popularized by the French cultural organisations, spread capillary-like throughout Argentina even more than in the rest of South America⁴. Thus, although their country welcomed immigration mostly from Italy,

¹ Roberto Pontual, “Entre la main et la règle: l'élan constructif en Amérique Latine”, in *Art d'Amérique Latine 1911-1968* (Paris: Edition du Centre Pompidou, 1992), 40.

² Serge Lemoine, “Nouveau monde”, *Ibidem*, 307

³ Julio Le Parc, “Manque de contraste”, *Diario* no. 16, June 1st, 1986 (concerning the exhibition “Contrastes de forma. Abstracción geométrica 1910-1980”, Salas Pablo Ruiz Picasso, Madrid); Wolf Roitman “Souvenirs”, *Kao* no. 3, October 1989

⁴ Concerning the diffusion of French culture in Buenos Aires in the 40s, see “Su Fontana e il Manifesto Blanco a Buenos Aires” (interview between Jorge Roccamonte and Enrico Crispolti), in *Lucio Fontana* (Rome: Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Milan: Electa 1998), 102.

Argentines in the 30s are more aware of Cubism than of Futurism.

Meanwhile, the good reputation of Parisian art schools and academies continued to attract many artists after the end of World War I. Following the closure of Bauhaus under Nazism, Paris hosted, among others, many pioneers and international protagonists of abstract and non-objective art⁵. In this context, new groups and reviews were created, recovering constructivist convictions: the Cercle and Carré group (1930)⁶, quickly converted into Art Concret (1930), and later into Abstraction-Création (1931-1936). Although some esthetical and formal differences between artists existed, all of them agreed on the social mission of abstract art: the construction of a better world and society. This commitment gave to such a wide group an ideological coherence, that is to say a proper unity.

Nevertheless, in Post World War II the situation of abstract art in Paris changed. The “Parisian hegemony” almost passed away, while new avant-gardes were developing in Switzerland, Germany and the United States. Beside Lyrical abstraction and “Tachisme”, Surrealism was the predominant style at that moment. Nevertheless, around a very small but combative circle of critics such as Charles Estienne⁷, Michel Ragon, Michel Seuphor and Léon Degand, some young galleries made a real commitment to promoting geometrical abstract art, such as Colette Allendy, Nina Dausset, Denise René, René Drouin. Meanwhile, the magazine *Art d’aujourd’hui*, launched in June 1949 by André Bloc (the future founder of the Groupe Espace), cast an exhaustive and perceptive gaze on abstract movements, with a particular focus on the international context.

Meanwhile, a naïf image of Paris as the ultimate reference point for modern art continued to animate South American artistic circles tend to refer to the role the city had during the previous decade⁸. In particular, for the numerous Rioplatense artists choosing at this moment abstract languages, Paris kept its status as the incontrovertible capital of abstract art. Such an idea certainly found its roots in the participation, during the 30s, of two South American artists in Parisian constructivist groups: the Uruguayan Joaquín Torres García’s in Cercle et Carré, and the Argentinean Juan del Prete in Abstraction-Création⁹.

From Paris to Rio de la Plata: Torres Garcia and the abstract avant-gardes

For young avant-gardes of Buenos Aires and Montevideo, in the 40s, Torres García represented the first real interlocutor, establishing the premises for a durable artistic project from South America. In fact, the other numerous artists that, starting from 1910s, participated in European abstract art’s achievement during their studies and training abroad, did not create any “school”, nor any Manifesto, and nor did they lead any group. Actually, the assimilation of Futurism and Cubism, the study of Klee and Kandinsky, was more formalistic than “grammatical” in the work of the Uruguayan Perez Barradas and the Argentinean Pettoruti, Xul Solar and Del Prete. They did not represent a drastic collective break, beyond the individual experience. Torres

⁵ including Mondrian, Vantongerloo, Van Doesburg, Delaunay couple, Kandinsky, Goncharova, Larionov, Pevsner, Gabo, Kassak, Prampolini, Lissitzky, Arp, Tauber-Arp

⁶ Founded by the Belgian Michel Seuphor and by Joaquín Torres García

⁷ With his pamphlet “L’art abstrait est-il un académisme” (1950) Charles Estienne takes distances with geometrical abstraction on behalf of “lyrical” abstraction, and of “tachisme” (as he called himself) since 1954.

⁸ In 1947, for instance, *Ver y estimar* magazine, directed by Romero Brest affirmed: “Paris is the centre of art as it was before the wars”⁸, reporting, some lines below, on the last Parisians cultural news: the Salon d’Automne, Utrillo’s exhibition, and the Gauguin’s anniversary celebrations

⁹ Two collages by Del Prete are reproduced in n. 2 of *Abstraction-Création* magazine in 1933. The particular link of Del Prete with Vantongerloo, inside this Parisian group, is one of the reasons of the strong and durable heritage of the Belgian artist in Argentinean concrete art in the 40s, inside *Arte Concreto-Invención*, *Madí* and *Perceptismo*.

García's precepts¹⁰ and his Escuela del Sur, on the contrary, opened to avant-garde movements in the real sense of the word, destined to durably inscribe Argentina within an international context. If Torres García was, for young avant-gardes of the 40's, the "unquestionable master and creator of Constructivism"¹¹, it's also because he was the intermediary between them and the French experiences of the 30s. While he preached to young artists that "learning from Europe would be learning to be American [and to] create with our own means"¹², he launched in May 1936, in Montevideo, the *Circulo y cuadrado* review: "second age of *Cercle et Carré*, founded in Paris by the modern constructive movement"¹³. In the first issue, the link with the French movement was explained, as well as the differences¹⁴.

Although the subtitle of the second issue of the review¹⁵ is: "Tradición constructiva de América", its pages, with a very similar layout to the French revue, welcomed articles by Von Doesburg, Boccioni, Mondrian, Ozefant, Huidoboro, and Severini. In the same issue, a link was advocated between the new Uruguayan review and the Italian *Il Milione*, the Chilean *Pro*, the Spanish *Gaceta de Arte*, the Swiss *Thèse, anthithèse, synthèse*, and the French *Cahiers d'art*. Some international avant-garde groups were also mentioned, as ADLAN in Madrid and Living art in New York¹⁶.

Indeed, the real and stronger heritage that *Circulo y cuadrado* recovers from *Cercle et Carré* is internationalism, as the primary characteristic of the modern abstract art movement.

In continuity, in dialogue or sometime even in polemic¹⁷ with Torres García's precepts, abstract avant-garde groups of Rio de la Plata between 1944 and 1949 (from the magazine *Arturo*, to the divisions of Arte Concreto-Invención, Madí et Perceptismo) kept a strong desire to interact with their foreign colleagues. The Arte Concreto-Invención Manifesto claimed that the origin of the movement lay in most progressive tendencies of European and American art¹⁸, and Madí's theoretical texts are translated into both English and French. While the artists of this group travelled and showed their works in Caracas, Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Paris, and Amsterdam, the Madí official revue included a special section on foreign non-figurative art (reproducing works of such artists as Pevsner, Kupka, Bill, Magnelli, Herbin, Perilli, Dorazio) and some detailed chronicles of local and international art news. Meanwile, Gyula Kosice, director of *Arte Madi Universal* magazine, came into direct contact with artists in Europe, and especially in Paris, wishing to publish their work¹⁹.

¹⁰ The lessons and articles by Joaquín Torres García between 1934 and 1943 are collected in 1944 in the book *Universalismo constructivo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Poseidon, 1944)

¹¹ "Aquí Madí", *Arte Madi Universal* no. 3, October 1949

¹² Joaquín Torres García, "El Nuevo arte de America" (1942), in *Universalismo constructivo*, op. cit.

¹³ *Circulo y cuadrado*, no. 1, May 1936

¹⁴ "The idea of "construction" must be at the root of our program, as it was during our action in Paris. But today this idea has gained ground and assumes a different meaning and expression. What we previously defined "structure" [...] doesn't only concern the arrangement of plastic concrete elements of what we call "construction". What we want to mean today exceeds this intention, while containing it. This means exactly the total (universal) order, *inside or by* this aesthetical arrangement", Joaquín Torres García, *ibidem*.

¹⁵ *Circulo y cuadrado*, no. 2, August 1936

¹⁶ Joaquín Torres García, "Nuestro saludo", *ibidem*

¹⁷ Cf. in particular the open polemic directly opposing Torres García and Maldonado in 1946 about relationship between American and European art (cf. C. Braschi "Invention of a new Americanism: abstract art movements of the Rio de la Plata", *Almanaque. Revista de Estudos Latino-Americanos*, no. 1, February 2010 (Rio de Janeiro: Universidade Federal Fluminense) <http://www.puro.uff.br/almanaque/artigos>)

¹⁸ Cf. Tomás Maldonado, "Invención-Arte Concreto-Invención", *Arte Concreto-Invención*, n. 1, Buenos Aires 1946

¹⁹ See for instance the letters sent to G. Kosice by: F. Kupka (20 March 1949), L. Fontana (1st June 1947), S. Delaunay (22 August 1950), A. Pevsner (5 October 1954), Paris: Centre de documentation du Musée National d'art Moderne, Bibliothèque Kandinsky.

From Rio de la Plata to Paris: Madí at the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles

Already in 1947, Kosice was in contact with the painter Aimé Félix Del Marle in Paris. He's probably introduced by the Argentinean sculptor Pablo Curatella Manés, still consul in Paris, before he moved to Oslo in 1947. In March 1948, Del Marle assured Kosice: "Your Madí's group is now very well known in Paris, because I distributed wherever it was necessary your very interesting tracts. People here are very interested in your efforts".²⁰ Nevertheless, the initial project to organise an exhibition in Paris "specifically on Madí"²¹ was converted, following Del Marle's suggestion, into Argentinean participation in the 3rd Salon des Réalités Nouvelles²² of which del Marle was the secretary. This exhibition is crucial for the Madí group, wishing to be known abroad and especially in Europe. The *Madí Internacional* magazine reported on it²³, and many years later its role is not denied.²⁴

The Madí's presence at 1948's Salon was actually very important also for the Parisian public, that was -as the journalist Pierre Descargues remembers²⁵- "hungry" to know what happened in Europe and in America, looking for some national characters (exuberance in South American, seriousness in Switzerland...) to be confronted with the "inevitable French measure".²⁶

Opening in 1946, the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles was a window onto international constructive abstraction, alongside the numerous kinds of abstraction existing at that moment, going from half-figuration to post-cubism²⁷. Recovering the heritage of Abstraction-Création, the Salon wished to be international, and to present geometrical abstraction as a universal phenomenon, particularly in the 1947-1953 period²⁸. From the 2nd edition of the Salon (1947), foreign sections were scheduled²⁹, and the Argentinean presence since 1948³⁰ did not go unnoticed by critics and journalists. Pierre Descargues, on *Arts*, welcomed the "burst of painting" and a "brutal, barbaric, insolent, new" art, able to "break every four right-cornered frame"³¹.

Compared to the typical products of European Neoplasticism and Constructivism, Madí draws attention by its use of sensory elements. In 1946 Kosice created the first work involving neon light, even before Fontana did³². Use of neon in kinetic art will be particularly developed afterward by the French François Morellet, inside the GRAV researches. Plexiglas (already employed between the two World Wars by Moholy Nagy and Vantongerloo) is another important material experimented and improved by Madí and concretist artists in Buenos Aires.

²⁰ Letter by A.F. del Marle to G. Kosice 1st March 1948, *ibidem*

²¹ *Ibidem*

²² July-August 1948

²³ *Arte Madí Universal*, no. 2, October 1948

²⁴ Gyula Kosice *Los primeros 15 años de arte Madí*, Buenos Aires: Museo de arte moderno, 1961

²⁵ Jean-Paul Ameline and Cecilia Braschi "Entretien avec Pierre Descargues", in *Denise René, l'intrépide*, (Paris: Musée national d'art Moderne-Centre Georges Pompidou), 54

²⁶ *Ibidem*

²⁷ cf. *Abstractions. France 1940-1965*, Paris: Musée national d'art Moderne-Centre Georges Pompidou, 1997

²⁸ Since 1953, the Salon's committee has been only composed by residents in France, and afterwards it becomes more and more withdrawn on French art. (cf. V. Wiesinger, "Le Salon des Réalités Nouvelles", in *Abstractions en France et en Italie 1945-1975, autour de Jean Leppien*, op. cit.)

²⁹ The "Salle d'honneur" hosts in 1947 North American artists under the aegis of the Guggenheim Museum, while the Swiss Allianz group and the Italian M.A.C. are shown since 1948.

³⁰ The works gathered by Kosice for the 1948's Salon were paintings (or articulated paintings) by Anibal Biedma, Rhod Rothfuss, Diyi Laan, Ricardo Pereyra and Rasas Pet, some transformable sculptures by Juan Delmonte, Kosice (*Escultura Girable plural*), Jacqueline Lorin-Kaldor and Maria Bresler (*Sobrerelieve*), and two mobiles by Rodolfo Uricchio (*Esculturas Rotor*).

³¹ Pierre Descargues in *Arts*, July 23, 1948

³² Fontana's *Grande neon* is presented at the Milan's Triennial in 1951, even if it was already prefigured in the 1949's *Ambiente spaziale ambiente nero*.

Promoted by Arden Quin since 1945³³, developed in the 50s and 60s by Boto, Vardanega, Sobrino and the GRAV, use of Plexiglas can be considered as a prerogative of South American artists in development of kinetic art.³⁴

On the other hand, the invention of “marco recortado” (shaped canvas) and of “coplanares” structures (composed of different flat elements, gathered by articulated rods and allowing never-ending variations) are perfectly coherent with a wider questioning of frames and shapes in painting, present in constructivist trends since the beginning of the century. They range from Mondrian’s “all over” compositions (1918) and El Lissitzky’s Prouns (1924) to the unusually shaped reliefs by Vonderberge-Gildewart, Domela and Tauber Arp³⁵. Following this tradition, the “marco recortado”, theorized by Rioplatense artists since 1944³⁶, allowed the artist to imagine opened and numerous shapes of painting, and anticipated the “shaped canvas” that Frank Stella and Kenneth Noland developed in North America starting from the end of 50s. Similarly, Jean Tinguely’s *Métamécaniques* of the 50s seems the subsequent development of moving Madí’s “coplanares”, as well as some “manipulable reliefs” by Yaacov Agam.

The presence of Argentinean artists in *Réalités Nouvelles*’s further editions was assured by Kosice, living in Paris since 1948. In 1953, beside some *Peintures Polygonales* by Pierre Alexandre, Guy Lerein and Roitman, and some *Optiques-vibrations* by Luis Guevara and Ruben Nuñez, the public could see for the first time some works, by Arden Quin, and Oscar Nuñez, actually animated by an engine.

Since 1953, the issue of movement in art, which commenced with articulations of flat coloured shapes, was present as well in the works of other abstract artists working in Paris. Pol Bury’s *Plans Mobiles* were exhibited in December at the Apollo Gallery in Bruxelles, while Agam’s *Signes pour un langage* were visible at the same time at the galerie Craven, in Paris.

Furthermore, Tinguely presented his first *Métamécaniques* at the Arnaud Gallery (Paris) in May 1954, and then in December at Studio b24³⁷.

“Le Mouvement”

This kind of research about movement, developing geometrical shapes and constructive aims, found an official consecration at the exhibition *Le Mouvement* at Denise René Gallery, in April 1955. Organised by Victor Vasarely and supported by Pontus Hultén, this exhibition gathered, until the aegis of Duchamp and Calder, the works of Jacobsen, Vasarely, Agam, Bury, Soto and Tinguely, investigating about real and virtual movement in art³⁸.

Except the Venezuelan Soto, no South American artists participate in this important exhibition³⁹

³³ “Our aims is to affirm Plurality and Playfulness [...] to use mass and void in a dialectical game; shine; transparency; real movement”, Carmel Arden Quin, *El Movil*, speech read at the home of E. Pichon-Rivière, 8th October 1945, translated into English in *Geometrical Abstraction. Latin American Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection*, (Yale University Press, 2001), 142-144

³⁴ Cf. Franck Popper, *L’art cinétique* (Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1970) 144

³⁵ Concerning the use of frame in constructive art see: Serge Lemoine “Cadre et socle dans l’art constructif” in *Le cadre et le socle dans l’art du 20ème siècle* (Paris: Musée d’art moderne – Centre Georges Pompidou, 1987), 70-115

³⁶ Rhod Rothfuss, “El marco: un problema de la plástica actual”, *Arturo. Revista de arte abstracto*, Buenos Aires, March 1944

³⁷ Cf. Domitille D’orgeval, “Le Salon des Réalités Nouvelles: pour et contre l’art concret”, in *Art concret* (Mouans-Sartoux: Espace de l’art concret, 2000) p. 24-39

³⁸ Works by Vasarely, Soto, Jacobsen and Agam investigate on virtual impression of movement on a flat surface, while Tinguely, Calder, Duchamp and Bury put a real (physical or mechanical) movement on their threedimensional works.

³⁹ Also if Madí is put aside from *Le Mouvement* exhibition, Denise René presents it in a group exhibition in February 1958. Elsewhere, the same gallery has shown since 1952 Arden Quin, Luis Guevara and Ruben

representing the beginning of kinetic art in Paris. Nevertheless, many of them shared the same interest in movement, vibration and optical effects⁴⁰.

References to movement, indeed, are present in Madí since the first group's exhibition in Buenos Aires, at Pichon Rivière's home, on 8th October 1945⁴¹, showing, among others, the first convertible sculptures by Arden Quin and Kosice⁴². The text presenting this exhibition recognized Futurism, Moholy-Nagy and Calder as precursors, even if Torres García is claimed as the "most direct source for our research"⁴³: their figurative articulated toys were advocated as the model for Madí's non-figurative articulated paintings⁴⁴.

Five years previous to *Le Mouvement*, the first Madí group's exhibition in a Parisian gallery was presented in 1950, by Colette Allendy, showing Arden Quin, Vardanega, Bresciani, Eielson, Desserprit, Chaloub, Lerein and Koskas. According to Roitman, this exhibition was visited by "the whole fashionable non-figurative Parisian world of the period"⁴⁵, but it was globally ignored by the influent art critics⁴⁶. It must be noted, in any case, that *Art d'aujourd'hui* did not miss to report on this exhibition.⁴⁷

It is also interesting to notice that, at this occasion, Arden Quin revised his own Manifesto of 1948⁴⁸, for a new one strongly emphasising the issue of movement in art, going as far as to affirm: "Movement, in its whole essence, splashes over all art, like a prodigious and electric river, by the turning impact of Madí"⁴⁹. This is probably why Michel Giroud can affirm, many years later, that *Le Mouvement* exhibition at Denise René Gallery "confirms Madí's innovations, without confessing it, through the Vasarely's Manifesto"⁵⁰. Actually, the Vasarely's "Yellow Manifesto"⁵¹ formalized in a clearer and more well-structured way some issues already discussed in several Madí's Manifestos. In particular, it advocated the decline of "old-time technique"⁵² and necessity to experiment, updating art with the latest advances in physics and science⁵³.

Vasarely talked about "metamorphosing" painting,⁵⁴ that he wished to incorporate into

Nuñez in the *Diagonale* exhibition, with Arp, Vasarely, Leuppi, Herbin and Pillet.

⁴⁰ Optical effects produced by the use of a similar motive on a monochromatic back, are enquired by Ruben Nuñez (*Point-Contrepoint*, 1951-1952), Luis Valera (*Movimiento Chaplin*, 1957) Jesus Rafael Soto, (*Progression*, 1952)

⁴¹ "Let us make painting mobile, sculpture mobile, architecture mobile, the poem mobile and thought dialectical" (C. Arden Quin, *El Movil*, op. cit.)

⁴² *Röyi*, by Kosice (1944) is the first mobile sculpture composed by articulated wooden elements.

⁴³ Carmelo Arden Quin, *El Movil*, op. cit.

⁴⁴ Playfulness is actually a very important aspect in Rioplatense abstract art, according to Madí's and Arte Concreto-Invencción's Manifestos between 1945 and 1949, also recovered by kinetics artists in Paris in the 60s, as Morellet, Le Parc, Demarco etc.

⁴⁵ Wolf Roitman "Souvenirs", in *Kao*, no. 3, October 1989

⁴⁶ Ibidem

⁴⁷ J. A. in *Art d'aujourd'hui*, May-June, 1950

⁴⁸ presented for a Madí *Matinée*, Buenos Aires, 4 April 1948, cf. D. Viéville in *Paris-Paris 1937-1957*, Musée national d'art moderne-Centre Georges Pompidou, 1981, p. 427

⁴⁹ Carmelo Arden Quin, 1950, reported in *Paris-Paris 1937-1957*, op. cit. p. 427

⁵⁰ Michel Giraud, "Arden Quin ou l'invention permanente", in *Kao*, n. 3, October 1989

⁵¹ Victor Vasarely, "Notes pour un manifeste" (tract) Galerie Denise René, Paris, 1955 (called "Yellow manifesto" after the yellow paper on which it was printed)

⁵² Ibidem

⁵³ Madí says: "With us, art finishes and science start [...] art is not a aliened ideology. Art make history and vice versa" (Carmelo Arden Quin, Paris 1950, op. cit.) and Vasarely confirms; "We have in our possession both the tools and the technique as well as the know-how to launch the kinetic plastic venture" (Victor Vasarely, "Notes pour un manifeste", op. cit.)

⁵⁴ Ibidem

architecture, toward the “spatial universe of polychromy”.⁵⁵ From the 40s, Rioplatenses abstract avant-gardes were concerned with the vocation of concrete art to be the “social art of tomorrow”,⁵⁶ able to articulate itself into modern public spaces and into contemporary daily life. In this way, Madí defined itself as “fenómeno ciudadano”.⁵⁷ “Madí’s revolutionary conception in architecture”, noticed by Pierre Guéguen, in the preface to the 1958’s Madí exhibition at Denise René Gallery⁵⁸ was to find a logical continuity in Kosice’s *Ciudad Hidroespacial* (1946-1972), in Nicolas Schöffer’s “Ville cybernétique”⁵⁹ (1955-1969), and in Vasarely’s “Cité polychrome future”⁶⁰ (1970).

In the “Yellow Manifesto” Vasarely introduced also the issue of “multiples”, derived from the concept of “transformability” of moving and articulated works. Such a matter, present already in Madí’s works and Manifestos, found an organic development in the Roger Bordier’s text⁶¹. From 1959, Denise René realised some “multiples” by the same artists participating in *Le Mouvement* exhibition, objects to be transformed by the spectator, proposing a new relationship between art and the public.⁶² Such an important issue was to be developed in kinetic art during the 60s.

Merging local premises into an international path

Since 1948, Kosice has moved to Paris, and so has Arden Quin, the other founder of Madí. He converted Madí movement in “Madí internacional” (still existing today) while the artists remaining in Buenos Aires joined new groups, quickly made “official” by institutional exhibitions, and losing the initial character of “avant-gardes”⁶³. A new important wave of Argentinean artist arrived in Paris at the end of the 50s and many of them are connected with the constructive trend⁶⁴.

In 1958, while Madí’s are shown at Denise René Gallery, a Vasarely exhibition at Museo de Bellas Artes of Buenos Aires directly introduced many young artists to his work. That probably pushed some of them to leave, and to join the kinetic *milieu* in Paris. Julio Le Parc, Horacio García Rossi and Francisco Sobrino, all former students of the Fine Art School of Buenos Aires, and all interested in Concretism and in Fontana’s Spacialism, moved to Paris in 1959. Hugo Demarco followed them in 1963. Vardanega (old member of Madí and Arte Concreto-Invencción, among the participants of the 1948 Salon des Réalités Nouvelles) moved also to Paris in 1959, with his wife Martha Boto, former founder of the Artistas no figurativos argentinos group, in 1956. Luis Tomasello preceded them in 1957. All those artists incorporated immediately into the

⁵⁵ Ibidem

⁵⁶ Tomás Maldonado, “Disegno industriale e società”, *Cea*, no. 2, October-November 1949. One can read already in *Arturo* magazine: “We must reconstruct the world. An artist doesn’t have a separated kingdom from common reality. New art is born from the wish to participate into our own world” (Edgar Bayley, “Durante mucho tiempo el criterio...”, in *Arturo. Revista de arte abstracto*, Buenos Aires, March 1944)

⁵⁷ “Esencialidad de MADÍ”, in *Arte Madí Universal*, no. 3, October 1949.

⁵⁸ Pierre Guéguen in *Art MADI international*, Paris: Galerie Denise René, 1958

⁵⁹ Nicolas Schöffer *La Ville cybernétique*, Paris: Tchou, 1969

⁶⁰ Victor Vasarely, *Plasti-cité*, Paris: Casterman, 1970

⁶¹ “The work of art has become today something that by its own substance and its own nature can constantly and perhaps indefinitely be re-created. [...] The work has liberated itself from its immutable character, its total fixity and that constraint of definitive composition by which we like to recognize it”, Roger Bordier, “L’oeuvre transformable” (tract) Paris: Galerie Denise René, 1955

⁶² Marion Hohlfeld “le multiple entre subversion et instauration. Quelques réflexions sur la spécificité d’un genre”, in *Denise René l’intrépide. Une galerie dans l’aventure de l’art abstrait*, op. cit.

⁶³ See for instance the exhibition “La pintura y escultura de este siglo”, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1952-53. See also: Andrea Giunta, *Avant-garde, Internationalism, and Politics: Argentine Art In The Sixties* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007) 47

⁶⁴ Ibidem, 143-151

Denise René Gallery, which became a dynamic and international meeting point for abstract and kinetic artists⁶⁵.

The Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV), created in 1961, and composed by three French and three Argentinean artists⁶⁶ is maybe the most exemplary case in which European and South American premises are merged. It inherited crucial aspects from Argentinean avant-gardes (playfulness, articulation and transformability of works, vision of art as a social project) and converted them, through the teaching of Vasarely and the international Parisian context, into a new topical artistic project. In this process, the role of *Le Mouvement* exhibition, connecting younger generations with such masters as Duchamp and Calder, is not to be underestimated.

As the very name of the GRAV points out (and as one can read on its “foundation’s act”⁶⁷) “research” carried a large importance for these young artists, along with a scientific attitude, and promotion of collective inquiry. Experimentation with industrial materials is once more crucial in the work of each member of the group⁶⁸, including in their collective works. GRAV’s interactive labyrinths (1962) play’s rooms (1965) and installations on the streets (1966), wished to demonstrate that art can exist outside of its traditional spaces (museums and galleries), can be playful, collective, democratic, and involve a real and active participation among spectators. The concept of “Instability”, already advocated by Madí and Arte Concreto-Invención, then elaborated by the artists of *Le Mouvement*, stepped forward in the GRAV proposal. Since the movement concerns both the work and spectators (especially since spectators can *create* works by changing their own position in the space) their relationship is no more “stable”, and the attitude itself of spectators stop being “static”.

Most important questions raised by the GRAV, such as the exigency to integrate art into life and the trust in creative ability of people to construct a better environment, concern more behaviour than style. Indeed, compared to the “Madí internacional” movement, which ended up fossilized in formal rules (despite its ambition of universalism and democratisation of art), GRAV comes to convert the strongest heritage of Constructivism and concrete art into a topical product of the 60s. Questioning the meaning of such concepts as “art”, “artist” or “work of art” and calling into question the role of the Museum as well as the usual relationship between art and public⁶⁹, GRAV’s aims match with other important and topical experiences of the same period, going from the Umberto Eco’s “Opera aperta” (1962)⁷⁰ to Fluxus and the happenings.

⁶⁵ Concerning the international opening of Denise René, see for instance some historical exhibitions as the “Klar Form” (travelling exhibitions in northern Europe 1951-1952), or “Précurseurs de l'Art Abstrait en Pologne” (1957) as well as the constant presence of foreign artists on the group exhibitions of the Gallery. Cf. *Denise René l'intrépide. Une galerie dans l'aventure de l'art abstrait*, op. cit.

⁶⁶ Morrelet, Stein, Yvaral, García-Rossi, Le Parc, Sobrino (Although he’s born in Spain, Sobrino is naturalized Argentinean)

⁶⁷ “Acte de fondation” of the Centre de recherché d’art visuel, prefiguring the GRAV (Paris, July 1960) Paris: Centre de documentation du Musée National d’art Moderne, Bibliothèque Kandinsky.

⁶⁸ Sobrino worked mostly with Plexiglas, Yvaral with nylon thread, Le Parc with Plexiglas, aluminium and light, Stein with polarised prisms, García Rossi with luminous boxes, and Morrelet with neon.

⁶⁹ Cf. the questionnaire “Enquête publique”, tract distributed during the exhibition “L’instabilité”, Paris: Maison des Beaux-Arts (Centre régional des oeuvres universitaires), April 1962, Ibidem

⁷⁰ Cf. GRAV, “Assez de mystifications”, tract distributed during the 3rd Paris Biennial, Paris, October 1963, Ibidem.

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A History of Entanglements: Latin America at the Venice Biennale in the
1970s

The present paper focuses on the relationship between the Venice Biennale and Latin America during the 1970s. I will examine three distinct events highlighting how the Venice Biennale assumed an ambiguous position in relation to the notion of Latin America, according to its political and cultural agenda. In the 1970s, Latin America became a protagonist in the life of the Venetian institution: in 1974 the democratic Chilean movements were celebrated as a political symbol against Fascism; in 1976, Latin American art production was victim of art-historical amnesia; and, in 1978, it was patronised and subsumed by the universal notion of art dictated by the “Western” paradigm, when a cultural *rappel á l’ordre* hit most Western European countries.

The analysis of the response (or the amnesia) of the Italian institution towards Latin America – considered as a geo-political area characterized by profound differences more than as a monolithic cultural identity – offers the possibility to question the use of the western canon in art and culture, and at the same time to highlight some of the structural characteristics of the Biennale, letting emerge its limits and possibilities.

To understand why, suddenly in 1974, the traditional roman numeration given to every Biennale edition was suspended; the Giardini were half closed and political *murales* spread around the city substituting the international art exhibition, it is necessary to go back to the 1968 and, to some extent, to 1938. The year 1968 was a watershed in the life of the Venice Biennale. In fact, during that year a numbers of problems that had been troubling the institution for some time finally blew up as students and workers joined together in protest as part of a wider European conflagrations of contrasts against a political, social, economic and cultural situation no longer endured by large part of the society. In just a few weeks, the Venice Biennale became the main target of protesters, the epitome of the bourgeoisie society whose final goal was to transform art into a capitalistic commodity for an elite group of consumers or connoisseurs. Shouting “Biennale dei padroni, bruceremo i tuoi padiglioni” (“Biennale of the lords, we will burn down your pavilions” students were joined in their protests by intellectuals and artists (such as the Venetian

painter Emilio Vedova and music composer Luigi Nono).¹ Some artists decided to withdraw their works from the Giardini; others turned the paintings' surface toward the wall. During the opening days, in response to demonstrations being staged in Piazza San Marco and around the *calli* (the Venetian streets), police were brought in to guard the Giardini. Protests denounced the gap between the institution and the populace; the award system that gave prizes such as best sculpture and best painter; and the commercial office of the Biennale whose aim was to sell exhibited artworks. It was in 1938 that a regulative code for the Venice Biennale was discussed and approved by the Italian Parliament for the last time, linking the Biennale to the cultural politic of the regime.² In other words, these regulations were drawn up under the Fascist dictatorship, and no new democratic principle that should have inspired the Biennale under the newly Italian Republic had been instituted. Adjustments were made to the 1938 regulations after the end of the Second World War with the removal from the directing committee of figures such as the representatives of the Minister of the Corporations or the Minister of the Cultural Propaganda but, apart from other small changes, no significant transformation was adopted by the newly elected democratic Parliament. There had been different attempts to present a law to reform the Biennale in

¹ Several newspapers at the time commented on the events of those days, magazine "Le Arti" published in 1974 an extensive photographic documentation by Ugo Mulas. *Le Arti* (1974), 'Biennale di Venezia, Numero Speciale' *Le Arti* luglio/agosto, Anno XXIV, n.7/8, 3-89

² Extensive research on the Biennale between the two world wars are presented in Stone M. (1998), *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy*, Princeton: Princeton Univeristy Press, and De Sabbata, M. (2006), *Tra diplomazia e arte. Le Biennali di Antonio Maraini (1928-1942)*, Udine: Forum Edizioni.

parliament since the end of the war, but these discussions had failed to translate into an effective legislation.³ What more than twenty years of political discussions could not reach, was instead achieved under the pressure of students' protests. In the case of the Venice Biennale, the year 1968 functioned as a catalyst for the process of discussion and eventual approval of the new law that would re-organize the entire institution (but not resolving its problems, especially from a financial point of view). In 1973, the Italian Parliament acknowledging some of the protesters' demands promulgated a law (Nuovo Ordinamento dell'Ente Autonomo "La Biennale di Venezia", Legge 26 luglio 1973, n. 438) with a new regulation for the Biennale's life. The directive committee, previously composed of five people was enlarged to nineteen, nominated respectively from the Minister of Culture, the Region Veneto, the Province of Venice, the city of Venice, the three most prominent Unions (CGIL, CISL and UIL, characterized by different political orientation) and one representative of the Biennale's employees. This enlarged directive board should have guaranteed a larger representation of the social (and political) components of the Republic, ensuring, at the same time, a vivid cultural debate to the Biennale. Whereas, due to its strong political ties, it became a pachydermic system quickly inscribed inside the political logics of the *lottizzazione*, that means the parceling out of specific sectors of the public

³ Wladimiro Dorigo, director of the A.S.A.C. – Archivio Storico delle Arti del Contemporaneo, from 1973 to 1983, published a book with the list of all the different laws promoted by the Italian Parliament from 1928 to 1973. Dorigo, W. ed.(1977) *Nuovo ordinamento dell'Ente autonomo La Biennale di Venezia : Legge 26 luglio 1973, n. 438 con le modifiche introdotte dalla Legge 13 giugno 1977, n. 324 : con un elenco di leggi e decreti dello Stato concernenti La Biennale di Venezia*, Venezia: Biennale di Venezia

administration (especially in the cultural field), among the bigger Italian parties: DC (Christian Democracy), PSI (the Italian Socialists Party) and PCI (the Italian Communist Party). In 1973, Carlo Ripa di Meana, a socialist, was nominated President of the Ente Autonomo La Biennale di Venezia. With the selling office closed, the abolishment of the awards' system and the attention to the general public, the Venice Biennale started a new chapter of its life. If the memory of 1968 was influenced the legislation on the Biennale, Italian history instead turned quickly away from it. The time span from 1968 to 1974 is marked by a series of violent protests among workers, political tensions, and a number of infamous terrorist attacks brought forth by neo-fascist groups. On the 25th of April 1969 two bombs exploded in Milan; on the 12th of December 16 people were killed in the *Strage di Piazza Fontana*, one of the most traumatic event in the history of the Republic; in December 1970 a right-wing *coup d'état* was attempted; and bombs were exploded again in 1971 and 1972. Therefore, when Chilean president Salvador Allende was killed on September 11th 1973 following Pinochet's coup, Italy was particularly sensitive and attentive to the Chilean situation. One month later on the 12th of October the Secretary of the Italian Communist Party, Enrico Berlinguer, proposed his political vision, the *compromesso storico* (historical compromise) in response to the bloody events in Chile.⁴ Proposing to abandon the traditional position of opponent of the two other major parties (DC and PSI), Berlinguer suggested

⁴ As demonstrated by the pamphlet published by Berlinguer E. (1973), *Riflessione dopo i fatti del Cile*, and commented in Lanaro S. (1992) *Storia dell'Italia Repubblicana. L'economia, la politica, la cultura, la società dal dopoguerra agli anni '90*, Marsilio:Venezia p.431 and in Crainz G. (2005) *Il paese mancato. Dal miracolo economico agli anni ottanta*, Roma: Donzelli, p.445

that the Communist Party would privilege the 'encounter among the three decisive components of the Italian history and its political reality: the communist, the socialist and the catholic'.⁵ This was a consistent reaction to the fear that something similar to Chile could have happened in Italy. The spectrum of the Chilean events entered immediately in the Italian collective imaginary due to the high pressure put on the social and political tissue by the so-called *strategia della tensione* (strategy of tension). An obscure political plan pursued by some right-wing sympathizers to move the public opinion toward their positions through terrorist attacks in order to demonise and weaken the Left to which the attacks were attributed.

Moved by the needs to reconnect the institution of the Biennale to the city and its inhabitants (a population comprehending not only those living in the historical centre of Venice but also in the hinterland such as Mestre, Marghera and others towns), and to be culturally engaged against the resurgence of extremist right-wing fringes in Italy, the Biennale's President Carlo Ripa di Meana decided to devolve the entire 1974 Biennale to the fight against "all the Fascisms". All the events of the 1974 Biennale were collected under the slogan "Per una cultura democratica e antifascista" (For a Democratic and anti-Fascist Culture) and took place from the 5th of October to the 17th of November.⁶ From the 6th to the 15th of October a series of manifestations dedicated to the "Libertà al Cile" (Freedom to Chile) took place all around the

⁵ My trans. G. Crainz (2005) p. 445

⁶ La Biennale di Venezia (1974), Cataloghi delle manifestazioni *Per una cultura democratica e antifascista*, Venezia: La Biennale di Venezia

province of Venice. Through painting, photography, cinema, theatre and music, the Biennale organized a series of events in the *campi* (the public spaces that characterized the social life of Venice) and in other places far from the historical center of the city.⁷ The first initiative of the week was the symposium dedicated to the fight against fascism, which featured a number of intellectuals, artists and partisans from around the world. This event caused the first tensions inside the directive committee, underlining the precarious relationships between the different political forces involved in the new constituted Biennale in the research of a new balance between culture and politic.⁸ One of the characteristics of this edition of the Biennale was the abolition of the traditional use of the Giardini. Most of the foreign pavilions were closed and the Italian one was dedicated to an exhibition of posters produced during the three years of government of Salvador Allende's political coalition *Unidad Popular*. Another key aspect of this particular edition was the blurring of artistic disciplines. Cinema, theatre, propaganda posters and murals were placed in the same space, abolishing the traditional festival formula adopted by the Biennale. Cinemas presented movies directed either

⁷ The documentation of all the events was collected and presented to the public in a publication edited by Wladimiro Dorigo. This yearbook will be published up until 1980, covering all the events of the 1970s and witnessing once again the high importance of the A.S.A.C. initiative under the directorship of Wladimiro Dorigo. Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee ed. (1975) *Annuario 1975: eventi del 1974*, Venezia: La Biennale di Venezia

⁸ As for example is witnessed by: Il Popolo (1974) *La D.C. alla Biennale. Per una autentica cultura democratica e antifascista*, Il Popolo, 14 september 1974; Corriere della Sera (1974), *Sul caso della nuova Biennale si accende la polemica politica*, Corriere della Sera, 19 september 1974; Rinascita (1974), *Alla ricerca di un nuovo rapporto tra politica e cultura*, Rinascita, 11 ottobre 1974. Polemics will develop during all the following weeks in several newspaper. An extensive documentation of it is reported in *Annuario 1975* op.cit. pp. 530-551

by Chilean directors or by movie-makers who had moved to Chile during Allende's government in order to record the economic and social transformations that were going on at the time. Popular and experimental music were also presented in different *campi*. Another key aspect of this edition was the participation of the *Brigada Allende*, a group of Chilean exiles artists living in Paris, invited to paint murals in some Venetian *campi* (such as Campo San Polo and Campo Santa Margherita) and urban spaces in Porto Marghera, Mira and Chioggia. An art developed during the Mexican Revolution and appropriated by different Latin American artists, murals became particularly popular in Chile during the three years of the *Unidad Popular*, thanks to the format's capacity to spread political messages. The *Brigade Allende* did not work on these projects on their own in Venice, but were joined by a group of Italian artists (mostly Venetian) involved in the fight against fascism, as well as by the Chilean painter Roberto Sebastian Matta.

All these activities, mixed together and displaced all around the region, created a stir among commentators, who didn't miss the opportunity to highlight how badly and poorly organized the entire show appeared: there were no important events able to attract tourists to the city, and only young students could be excited by the possibility of discussing politics and democracy. Nevertheless, this edition of the Biennale was successful in its aim of increasing both public attendance and involvement, policies which came about as a direct response to the 1968 protests. The main critique was the too literal approach adopted by the Biennale in its protest against fascism:

reducing the artistic and glamorous events to a didactic political protest; Ripa di Meana was accused to be demagogical.⁹ Whether it was an act of demagogy dictated by the shortage of budget or by a political belief is not the contention of the present paper. What it is interesting, is the way in which the entire operation was inscribed in respect to the history of the Biennale. While the previous Biennale editions were characterized by a Roman number, this edition was not marked by any progressive number. It is interesting to note how, if from one point of view this was intended to mark a break with tradition at the same time, there is a more subtle element that should be taken into consideration. As we have seen, in 1974 *murals* and propaganda posters from Chile were the only artistic production displayed at the Venice Biennale. These forms of art were directly drawn from the Chilean tradition, with a strong political reference. Therefore it marked an interesting inclusion of a non-western tradition. But giving up the roman numeration seems to highlight the impossibility to inscribe Chilean production inside the history of the Biennale: what is recognized powerful and productive at a political level, does not deserve the same recognition at an artistic one.

The roman number would have been again resume for the edition of 1976, when the Italian historical framework was moving out from the years of the *strategia della tensione* towards the so-called *anni di piombo* (the years of Brigate Rosse terrorism). When in 1974, in another neo-fascist action, a bomb

⁹ In 1974 Italian newspaper "Corriere della Sera" published a series of article on the Biennale. In particular, Fedele d'Amico in 'Il discutibile antifascismo della Biennale', 12 November 1974 stressed how the Biennale's direct approach in denouncing all the Fascists was too simplistic.

exploded in Piazza della Loggia in Brescia, unionist Claudio Sabbattini commented how the bomb did not spread terror but, instead, it strengthen 'political decision, discipline, mass participation'.¹⁰

A significant transformation occurred in the Italian political life with the 1975 elections that marked a conspicuous advancement of the communist party, but, at the same time, the reconfirmation of the leading role of the Christian Democratic party, despite the numerous scandals in which it was involved. If the feeling of the menace of a coup started to decline, at the same time there was a still a high level of political consciences, something that toward the turn of the decade would have quickly disappeared, buried by the violence of the events of the 1977 and 1978.

Participation was one of the key concepts around which the Venice Biennale of 1976 was be organized. With a higher budget and a longer time to prepare, the 1976 Biennale presented itself according to a new style. It continued the multidisciplinary format instituted since the 1974 reform, but the art presentation regained its prominent place. Alongside different art exhibitions, the institution organized shows dedicated to sectors such as architecture and design. Since 1974, the director of the old Figurative Art (now Visual Art and Architecture) sector was Vittorio Gregotti, who, as one of the leading Italian commentators on architecture did not come from the traditional art historical background that usually characterized directors of the Venice Biennale. The

¹⁰C. Sabattini, *Strage di Brescia, fascismo e classe operaia* in G. Crainz, *Il paese mancato*, p.488

Biennale also confirmed its fight against fascism by celebrating Spain's freedom from the dictatorship of General Franco, who had died in 1975. The innovative approach of the 1976 Biennale is reflected in the three general themes: *Ambient/ Participation/ Cultural Structures*. The three terms are linked to one another in a reinforcing relationship, stressing how participation and the creation of cultural structures are influenced by and are influencing the ambient in which, as singular and as a community, we are living. *Ambiente/Arte* and *Attualità Internazionali '72-76* were the two main art events organized by the Biennale in this edition. The first one is a landmark and timely exhibition curated by Germano Celant. 'The ambient' was starting to be an issue discussed internationally: Celant wrote about 'the ambient' in a 1975 *Studio International* article entitled 'Artistspace', while in 1976, Brian O'Doherty published his landmark articles dedicated to the white-cube in *Artforum*. In relation to my paper, it is interesting to note how the exhibition curated by Celant aimed to recover an amnesia presents in the critical debate: the relationship between the artist and the ambient. Celant claimed that it was now time to re-think the categories through which art history has been written, in order to move beyond the notion of the singular art object and to recognize the importance of its context. In fact in this way it would be possible to escape the commodification of the art and to be loyal to the artistic intentions. Interesting enough, Celant's exhibition, despite its attempt to readdress the critical agenda of the western canon, failed to recognize the existence of different modernities and modernisms. Artists such as Hélio Oiticica or Lygia

Clark that were operating since the 1960s in Europe were not considered as part of the historical narrative that the critic retraced. The parallel show, *Attualità Internazionali '72-76* organized by Pontus Hulten, Olle Granath, Eduardo Arroyo, Enrico Crispolti and Tommaso Trini at the ex-cantieri navali at the Giudecca, aimed to present to the public the artistic productions of the last five years. Inside this more generic framework, artists such as Oiticica, Cildo Meireles and Antonio Manuel (all from Brazil) found their place. It can be useful to compare the exhibition design of the two events to understand the different frameworks in which to inscribe the discourses produced.¹¹ While Celant's exhibition aims to recover a different art-historical narrative in the central pavilion at the Giardini, through an inspired installation design able to articulate a critical discourse within the space of the pavilion, the '72-76 exhibition looked more like an anonymous showcase of the latest tendencies, with each artist offered a white box separate from each other, denying any critical discourse and resembling more a trade fair. If, on one hand, the participation of international artists such as the Brazilians in the '72-'76 exhibition acknowledged their importance, on the other hand, there was still a resistance to inscribing them inside a larger historical framework: they were not recognizable yet to an art historical narrative.

If 'ambient' was the thematic framework in which the all activities of the 1976 Biennale were inscribed, 'nature' would be the umbrella for the 1978 edition. The historical context for the 1978 edition was one of a traumatic moment in

¹¹ As the photographic documentation published by Domus (1976), November, n.564 p. 10 and pp. 14-17

the history of the Italian Republic. During 1977, violent demonstrations by students and anarchist groups ignited across many Italian cities. Whereas the protesters who took to the streets in 1968 were optimistic that they might change the world, the “generazione 77” (generation of '77) was more disenchanted and pessimistic.¹² On the 16th of March 1978 Aldo Moro – the former prime minister and general secretary of the Christian Democracy party – was kidnapped and killed at the beginning of May by a leftist terrorist group called ‘Brigate Rosse’. The assassination of Moro marked the end of an era of commitment and participation, opening what is generally called the season of the ‘riflusso’ (the ‘flow back’ into the private). There was a general feeling of being fed up with the political discourse and activism. The Biennale in some ways, registered this atmosphere: Carlo Ripa di Meana, who should have stepped down in 1977 at the end of his four years as President, accepted an offer to once again organize the Venice Biennale. The 1978 Visual Art section was dedicated to the theme of art and nature. A team of international and Italian curators was invited to organize an extensive historical exhibition from the avant-garde up until the 1970s to explore all the possible developments of such a theme.¹³ This was the second time that the Venice Biennale had proposed a generic theme under which all the different international participations should have been collected, but for the first time, it was a decision taken by all the representatives of the different pavilions. And, for the

¹² This difference has been pointed out by Crainz G. (2005) p. 572

¹³ The exhibition “Dalla natura all’arte, dall’arte alla natura” was curated by Jean Christophe Ammann, Achille Bonito Oliva, Antonio Del Guercio, Filiberto Menna in the Italian Pavillion.

first time, a voice decried the uncomfortable position of this call. In the 1978 catalogue, Colombian artist Beatriz González decided to publish a letter to convey her discontent. 'Nature' was proposed as a theme in order to facilitate the participation to the Biennale of countries in which there are 'different situations' in terms of artistic production.¹⁴ Beneath the good intentions, a patronizing attitude was at the same time emerging, and Gonzalez's text underlined the ambiguous position occupied by the Biennale in respect to its claimed internationalism. There would have been an opening to the rest of the world not through a reconsideration of the canon, but through the choice a theme so anodyne that everyone everywhere could fit in. The "Letter to the reader" published in Italian in the catalogue by Beatriz González is an important document not only because of its content, but also because it is one of the rare occasions in which an artist raised her voice to make a statement in Venice. "Some months ago, my work was selected by the Colombian Institute of Culture to participate at the XXVIII Biennale of Venice. Since my designation, until the moment of my acceptance and to the beginning of the production of the work, I have encountered all kinds of difficulties as for the theme imposed by the Biennale: *From Nature to Art, to Art and Nature*. I have never worked with a given theme, and I cannot propose anything different from what my practice is already presenting".¹⁵ In the end, González chose to

¹⁴ As claimed by Ripa di Meana in his introduction to the 1978 Biennale catalogue "This problematic [the Nature] opens possibilities of participation both to highly industrialised nations and to countries characterised by different situations from a social, historical and cultural perspective" La Biennale di Venezia (1978) *Dalla natura all'arte, dall'arte alla natura*, Venezia: La Biennale di Venezia

¹⁵ My trans. Beatriz González "Lettera al lettore" in La Biennale di Venezia (1978), p.96

present “Mobile Screen – Changing Nature”, 1975, a scruffy and enlarged copy of Manet’s “Le déjeuner sur l’herbe” on a theater-like curtain. In her letter the artist tells the reader on the difficulties of having a direct experience of the beauty of nature; in fact for her, every landscape looks like an illustration. To get along with the theme of Nature, the artist decided to start reading a late nineteenth century book on how to paint landscapes. In particular, she was intrigued by Constable’s admissions that he had to forget what a painting is in order to start depicting nature. This thought stood opposite to González, interested in introduce European art within her ambient. In previous work, she put shabby reproductions of European masterpieces within tables, chairs and other furniture, in order to underline how these reproductions are part of the everyday imaginary and life of Colombians, and at the same time, they are the privileged vehicle through which European art is known and experienced in her country. By painting Manet’s work on a curtain, González is recalling an experience she once had whilst looking at the cover of a magazine where sun and dust had transformed the reproduction of *Le déjeuner sur l’herbe* into a pale copy of the original. “It was all that arrived to us of the ever-changing aspect of nature that the Impressionists tried to fix in their painting. I have done anything else than to look at the European culture from a provincial perspective, through illustration of books, catalogues of museums and tourist guides. For me, the same Nature is just a big backdrop for this culture”.¹⁶ In presenting her work in the 1978 Biennale catalogue, critic Eduardo Serrano pointed out how the wit and irony of González’s work underlines the

¹⁶ My trans. ibidem

alterations to which the history of art's cultural nature is subjected. Relating her production to her conception of 'Nature' as a cultural construct, González deliberately uses acid colors and bad copies, according to popular techniques of reproduction embedded in the Columbia everyday life. González's contribution to the Biennale is therefore a subtle and ironic critique of the western canon that despite the openness of the Biennale, was barely questioned at the time. At the same time, her position underlines the possibility to develop a critical position within the institution itself and its contradictions. In fact, as the title of Serrano's text "La natura del sottosviluppo" (the nature of the underdevelopment) highlights, not only González's profound conscience of the European conceptual notion of Nature was stressed, but also it was subtly questioned the Biennale's idea of having the theme of Nature to help the so-called "underdeveloped" countries to participate at the 1978 edition.¹⁷

Through these three events that relate the Venice Biennale to Latin America we can see the complexity of the relationships embodied by such an institution: international in its vocation but local in its strategic organization and cultural reflection. This is something that clearly emerged through the perspective offered by Latin America and the way in which at different times (and according to different situations) the Venetian institution has been able to put itself and its cultural basis in relationship to the otherness. Moreover, it points out how it is not possible to separate the Biennale both from the Italian

¹⁷ Eduardo Serrano in La Biennale (1978) E. Serrano, *La natura del sottosviluppo*, p.94

context and from its peculiar structure. During the 1970s, the reformed Venice Biennale structure, despite its limits and ambiguities, started to allow different positions to emerge and find their voices, questioning the main historical narrative and providing a platform for a numbers of debates (such as the internationality of a work of art, the relationship between art and politic in an exhibition and the representation of 'others') that are still under question today.

The Argentine *concreto* and Brazilian *neoconcreto* movements can be considered within the Americas the beginning of modern art (as opposed to *modernismo* in the Spanish-speaking countries), especially if we define this term as a mode of self-referentiality on form and medium. Moreover, the two artistic practices act as a touchstone for the formation of “contemporary art” within Latin America with their establishment of key concepts and theories still used by artists, critics and historians today. They fit neatly within the narrative of post-World War II optimism forming the primitive building blocks of this new society undergoing the process of modernization. My paper does not necessarily stray from any of these observations, but rather asks how concrete art served as a strategy for these two groups within their particular historical and social settings to develop a local modernity. In a recent essay, “For a Genealogy of Brazilian Constructivism,” Brazilian art historian Fernando Cocchiarella maps out the place of Brazilian Concretism and Neoconcretism within the expanded history of Russian Constructivism and European concrete art. A confusion has often existed between the confluence of these terms not for the European or Russian traditions but for those artistic groups who came after in the Americas. My paper aims to further entangle the Argentine and Brazilian movements within the discourse of concrete art in order to deepen our understanding of how both groups used the art form and its rhetoric to shape modernism on their own terms.

Mariola V. Alvarez
“The Remaking of Art: Neoconcretismo and the Argentine Connection”
Transnational Latin American Art
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The Argentine *concreto* and Brazilian *neoconcreto* movements can be considered within the Americas the beginning of modern art (as opposed to *modernismo* in the Spanish-speaking countries), especially if we define this term as a mode of self-referentiality on form and medium. Moreover, the two artistic practices act as a touchstone for the formation of “contemporary art” within Latin America with their establishment of key concepts and theories still used by artists, critics and historians today. They fit neatly within the narrative of post-World War II optimism forming the primitive building blocks of this new society undergoing the process of modernization. My paper does not necessarily stray from any of these observations, but rather asks how concrete art served as a strategy for these two groups within their particular historical and social settings to develop a local modernity. In a recent essay, “For a Genealogy of Brazilian Constructivism,” Brazilian art historian Fernando Cocchiarale maps out the place of Brazilian Concretism and Neoconcretism within the expanded history of Russian Constructivism and European concrete art. A confusion has often existed between the confluence of these terms not for the European or Russian traditions but for those artistic groups who came after in the Americas. My paper aims to further entangle the Argentine and Brazilian movements within the discourse of concrete art in order to deepen our understanding of how both groups used the art form and its rhetoric to shape modernism on their own terms.

So let me begin with some facts familiar to most of us:

In 1930 the text “Art Concret. The basis of concrete painting” was written by Theo van Doesburg and others and published in the inaugural issue of the journal *Art concret*. In 1936 and

then again in 1949 Swiss artist Max Bill adopted and adapted this text in order to revitalize the concrete art movement in Europe. In 1946 a group of Argentine artists, including Tomás Maldonado, published “Manifiesto Invencionista” in the journal *Arte Concreto-Invención*. And in 1957 Ferreira Gullar published his essay, “Poesia concreta: experiência intuitiva” in the newspaper *Jornal do Brasil*. Beyond these facts, the term multiplies in complexity and uncertainty. Both Maldonado and Gullar initially downplay the significance of the 1930 text by reducing the term “concrete art” to just another name for abstract art, and, as a result, turn to Bill as the leader of this revitalized art form.¹ Within the history of Brazilian Concrete art, the influence of Bill and his appearance at the first São Paulo Bienal in 1951 has overshadowed the narrative and served as a quasi-“origin myth.” In this paper I do not intend to completely circumvent Bill, but rather to intensify the multiple forces around the formation of any artistic movement and the production of knowledge across borders, including national and artistic borders. My paper does not seek to establish influences, nor reify cultural identities but rather to perform a discursive analysis of the writings of artist and critic Tomás Maldonado and poet and critic Ferreira Gullar threaded through the original texts by van Doesburg as constructions of the concrete. My intention is to set up a working chronology of concrete art in order to ask: what is concrete art? How does it position the artist and the work of art? And finally, what kind of object does it produce? These questions lead to an examination of how Maldonado and Gullar translated concrete art not in the hopes of establishing a single definition, nor a “Latin American” paradigm, but rather to address the tensions inherent in its initial formation and as it moved across borders. In the most elemental way, why concrete art? Lastly, I think through these artistic practices as political acts. Though Neoconcretism did not consider it self a political agent, it cannot escape or transcend the politics it nevertheless put into motion. Within their specificities,

both movements need to be read not only as emblematic of their historical moments but also as responses to the growing tensions of rapidly changing societies. How can the translation of concrete art be understood as more than a facile elucidation of “the modern”? Can it actually be read as *against* a particular kind of modernization, specifically in the form of advanced capitalism?

I.

The choice of the name “Neoconcrete” did not signify for the carioca poets and visual artists a break with the traditions of Concrete art, but rather a deepening of them. As Gullar writes, “The principal characteristic of Neoconcrete art is to make the geometric language of Concrete art expressive.”² I want to emphasize the word “expressive” in this quote because the word and its variant forms are used fourteen times throughout the manifesto that gave birth to the movement in 1959. This is not the semantic use of “expression” found say in Abstract Expressionism, larger than life canvases with dramatic and often gestural outpourings rooted in the tradition of Surrealism. Instead the word allowed Gullar to re-constitute the role of the artist against the way it had been defined by van Doesburg in the 1930s. Van Doesburg envisions the artist as a scientist, for example when he writes, “Everything is measurable, even spirit with its one hundred and ninety-nine dimensions. We are painters who think and measure.”³ Or more pointedly when he compares the paintbrush to a surgical instrument and encourages artists to learn from the medical laboratory.⁴ Gullar rails against the potential evacuation of the subject through the transformation of the artist into a kind of receiver, or one who simply applies laws and formulas, instead of creating new meanings in the world. And even more strictly, Gullar’s humanist rhetoric denounces van Doesburg’s call for the erasure of the human. Van Doesburg points out the “human weakness such as trembling, imprecision, hesitation” that should be

omitted from the artist's practice.⁵ Or on another occasion he writes, "The best handicraft is the one which displays no human touch. Such perfection is dependent upon an environment of absolute cleanliness, constant light, a clear atmosphere and so forth."⁶ Van Doesburg predicts the rational control offered by mathematics and scientific laws will usher in an "era of certitude...of perfection."⁷ Neoconcrete art instead commits itself fully to the assertion of a sensorial human body—a mutable body. From this perspective, the opposition to the *a priori* not only supports the existentialist tendencies of the Neoconcrete texts but also exposes a fear of the reduced role of the artist. Though perhaps still imbued with a certain Romanticism, the Neoconcrete artist is not the hermeneutic center of the work, but rather the work "is *always in the present, always in the process of beginning over*, of beginning the impulse that gave birth to it over again—whose origin and evolution it contains simultaneously."⁸ The artwork does not serve as a psychoanalytic mirror of the individual artist's interiority but rather returns man to the "real," understood here as the site of lived experience. Moreover it is the viewer-participant who ultimately completes the work. The birth of the viewer though did not necessitate the death of the artist within Neoconcretism. As an existentialist, Gullar could not believe in van Doesburg's call for the work of art to be fully conceived before its production because human existence precedes essence.⁹ (Point two of the concrete art manifesto of 1930: The work of art should be fully conceived and spiritually formed before it is produced.) Instead phenomenology offered Gullar a way out of an idealist conception of art, as well as a language to describe the act of making as an intersubjective experience between the artist, the artwork, and the viewer-participant—a "presencing" of one to the other, a plenitude. Inherently then, the temporality of art production is the present, an ever renewing present with a potentiality(ies) for change, and not a fixed tomorrow of "certitude" and "perfection."

Maldonado addresses van Doesburg from a different angle, not an opposing pole, when it comes to the role of the artist. As a member of the Communist Party, Maldonado believed the concrete artwork would return man to the world, and not deceive him with false illusions of representations of this world (i.e. figurative art). “Concrete art, instead, exalts the Being, because it practices it. An art of action, it generates the will to act.”¹⁰ For the Argentine Concretists, the artwork actively participated in the world and encouraged man to also partake, including the artist. The “Being” in this quote is both existence and the act, or existence constituted through action. They do not espouse then the artist as a passive recipient of mathematical formulas and laws either. Instead the artwork locates its purpose in what it does, or what the Concretists hoped it would do—transform the material relations of society. In accordance with his Marxist leanings, the artist then is a direct cause of the transformation of society and the relations of men and things through his constructive act. In addition I would argue an art of action, or “invention as pure creation” to borrow from Nelly Perazzo, locates the act of production in the present tense and, like Neoconcrete art, removes Concrete art from the ideal realm. Maldonado writes:

The works of concrete art, at bottom, and contrary to what has often been formulated, are not just objects. They are also acts (*hechos*). Acts, which happen, which flow. And, most significantly, acts which happen and flow between us. In other words, acts we perceive, we see coming or going, to which we can move towards or from which we can distance ourselves. Perception and communication.¹¹

I want to take a moment to say that this is my own translation because the English translation of this text in the *Nueva Visión* book makes the choice to translate the word “hechos” as “facts” substantially changing the meaning of Maldonado’s words. Though the word “fact” can signify a thing done, the “happen and flow” of the quote pushes towards a mutability, a renewable action on the part of the doer. Though the “heroic period” of Argentine Concrete art had already faded by the date of this text (1954), Maldonado’s words still echoed the original Inventionist

Manifiesto (1946) quoted above and the production of art as a call to action and the obligation of the artist as an act-or in the remaking of art and society in the now.

The Argentine emphasis on action also introduces the role of labor or work within the discourse of Concrete art. Van Doesburg makes several comments that should be looked at more closely for comparative analysis. We already know that he conceived of the artist as a scientist, as an intellectual. Communism was not averse to intellectuals; Antonio Gramsci and his writings on the role of the intellectual were a huge influence on the Argentines (and the Paulistas). But for van Doesburg the artist-intellectual is severely separated from the world. In one of his most histrionic writings yet, he states, “The studio of the modern painter must reflect the ambience of mountains which are nine-thousand feet high and topped with an eternal cap of snow. There the cold kills the microbes.”¹² Isolated, white, cold and uncontaminated, the position of the artist stands in sharp contrast to the Argentine vision of jubilant invention, collective action and “PRACTICE, WORK.”¹³ Maldonado counters van Doesburg’s division of labor and intellect:

And if it is still possible to denounce in its creative method certain aftertastes and residues of abstraction, it is due to the fact that a work of concrete art cannot escape—nor even pretends to—its condition as a human work, or better said, a work that man has invented with the totality of his being, with his hands, but also, let us not forget, with his capacity to abstract.¹⁴

Not only does Maldonado emphatically refute van Doesburg’s derision of the human but infuses the production of art with a sense of the manual—“with his hands.” In contrast to van Doesburg’s definition of Concrete art as “not created with the fingers,” or his jab at painters as “pastry-cooks and milliners,” Maldonado considers the artist capable of and empowered by both manual and intellectual labor.¹⁵ With this view of the artist, it is easy to see how Maldonado will eventually turn to the revolutionary power of the architect, the urban planner, and the designer as the true agents of change in society.

II.

Obviously these two artist-critics did not share the same political beliefs. Maldonado again was a card-carrying Communist who did not hesitate to impose his politics on his art practice and criticism, while Gullar attempted at every turn (before 1961) to eschew any political language from his arguments about poetry and art. And yet though both artistic groups have most commonly been placed within a map of the “developing” and “modern” Americas, I would argue that simultaneously both men also use Concrete art to shun this encroaching present and impending future, especially with its rapidly-moving and culture-changing system of commodities. I do not mean to imply that the artworks themselves were being sold and circulated like commodities. In both countries, a vital art market still did not exist. Instead I argue that the growth of a consumer culture changed the meaning and value of the art object. Concrete art offered both of these artistic groups strategies to counter the oncoming commodification of their economies and cultures through the transformation of the artwork into more than an object.

When it comes to the Argentine Concretists, my paper takes a cue from Christina Kiaer’s brilliant study, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism*, which asks the questions: what happens to the object in the transition from capitalism to socialism? What happens to the desires that surround that object? Now obviously, Argentina was not Russia circa 1917, nor was it moving from capitalism to socialism, but I would like to argue that a Marxist-Communist inflection influenced the rhetoric surrounding the object of art. Throughout Maldonado’s writings you find persistent mention of the fantasies and phantoms of figurative art. He writes for example, “Representative art is not realist; it can never be: it only creates phantoms of things.”¹⁶ Of course, one reading of comments like these is within the frame of Concrete art as defiantly against figuration and anything that even slightly resembles figuration. Representative

art creates doubles of the surrounding world. It becomes a “container” that dulls the full capacity of man.¹⁷ But Maldonado wanted Concrete art to *do* more than be non-representational; he wanted to transform man’s relationship to things. In the past art created a fiction between man and thing, and thus alienated man from himself. Instead the Concrete object directly acts upon man and the world. It brings man into a closer connection with reality through a deeper understanding of the object or “TO really KNOW an object involves an unlimited happiness for man, an affirmation of his power.”¹⁸ The artwork, a product of human hands, brings the artist into relation with his own labor, as well as moves out into the social, almost as an “animate participant in social life,” or what Kiaer calls the “socialist object.” Within capitalist economies, the worker is not only alienated from his own labor but also seduced by the illusions of the commodity. A false relationship ensues between the consumer and the commodity not dissimilar from the relationship between man and figurative art criticized by the Argentine Concretists. “Representational art tends to cushion man’s cognitive energy, to divert him from his own power.”¹⁹ Instead the Concrete object “is united fluidly and naturally with the rest of the universe” because it is “real”—concrete.²⁰ And let us remember, the art object can construct *and* unite a public, a re-formed society—“acts which happen and flow between us.” For this reason, Concrete art will become “the social art of tomorrow.”²¹

For Gullar the artwork would also move out into the world (both critics firmly believed in the synthesis of the arts), not as a “socialist object,” rather as an “almost-body.”²² Neoconcretism offers a philosophical-ethical study of the artwork, and therefore can be read as a proposition for the structure of social relations between individuals, but it can also be interpreted as a mode of critique of the contemporary modernization of Brazil. Gullar conceives of the Neoconcrete object in deep time, against what he claims to be the shallow time of Concrete art. Within the

São Paulo Concretist circle, art objects became products—products of science, products of industry, and therefore situated the artist as an industrial manufacturer. In the essay, “Concrete Poetry: An Intuitive Experience,” which initiated the rupture of the Brazilian Concrete project in 1957, Gullar begins with the removal of Concrete poetry from the realm of efficiency or speed, an obvious response to the reduction of words within the genre but also a critique of the object too closely associated with the factory or laboratory.²³ The São Paulo poets, on the other hand, did not shy away from the object as surface or, in the following quote from Noigandres poet Haroldo de Campos, the object as industrial.

It [Concrete poetry] responds to a notion of literature, not as *craftsmanship* but, so to speak, as an *industrial* process. Its product is a prototype, not the typical handiwork of individual artistry. It tends toward a minimal, simplified language, increasingly objectified, and for that reason, easily and quickly communicated.²⁴

A result of the industrial process. A prototype. Easily and quickly communicated. In these words we can locate many echoes of van Doesburg’s manifesto, which also called for simple and direct visualization and absolute clarity.²⁵ Gullar frames the Neoconcrete artwork as an almost-body, and as a result sets up a binary with the Concrete artwork as a machine, as a product, as a surface without an inside, or what Jon Tolman calls “the thingness of things.”²⁶

The Neoconcrete object attempts to be more than a thing amongst things, and the question is can we expand that to be more than a commodity amongst commodities. For this reason Gullar theorizes the non-object. Inspired by the work of the Neoconcrete artists, and especially Lygia Clark’s *Bichos*, Gullar develops the “Theory of the Non-Object” in 1959. In simplest terms the non-object designates those Neoconcrete objects that are neither painting nor sculpture. But more profoundly, and in contrast to the proposed “socialist objects” of the Argentine Concretists, the non-object removes itself from the realm of use-value. In other words, for Gullar, the function of a name is to point to an object’s use and therefore its preconceived

meaning or purpose. The non-object, released from a name—a non-, a no-thing—and thus a designated function, “is pure appearance.”²⁷ The viewer-participant apprehends the non-object as pure phenomenon, without pre-conceptions of artistic categories (neither painting nor sculpture), without reflected consciousness but rather with the senses. But how is “pure appearance” not the “surface” of Concrete art? Where then or how does the non-object accrue meaning? The concern for Gullar, as he claims it was for Malevich and Mondrian, is “the problem of signification.”²⁸ And this question returns us to the larger question of how Concrete art signifies, and the ambiguity located at the center of all abstract art. Influenced by the *Bichos* series, and radically unlike the claims of Minimalism, a comparison often made by scholars, Gullar anthropomorphizes the non-object. Transformed into “an almost-body” and a “living organism,” the non-object removes itself from the system of serial capitalist production, from the “one thing after another.” Filled-up, given a spine, granted an inside, the Neoconcrete work re-asserts the individual in the face of advancing modernization and industrialization. And though the argument for Neoconcretism firmly places it outside of politics, its emphasis on the individual and the body will find resonance during the following years of dictatorship (1964-1985) and the turn to an art of bio-politics, where the individual and the body are *the* sites of resistance. In other words, Gullar developed a vocabulary that would find a renewed sense of meaning within a sphere of political activism in Brazil the 1960s and 70s, for example with the works of Antonio Dias, Anna Bella Geiger, Anna Maria Maiolino, Carlos Zilio and others.

In this paper I trace the genesis of the concrete art movement within the writings of the Argentine artist and critic Tomás Maldonado and the Brazilian poet and critic Ferreira Gullar through the lens of the original texts by Theo van Doesburg in the hopes to examine the elasticity of the term concrete art. Though borders, language and a –neo divide them, both authors adopted

the visual language and theoretical rhetoric of concrete art in order to constitute the modern within their “developing” nations *and* also to resist a pre-formed version of modernity. Abstract art became within the twentieth-century the visual language *de rigueur* of modernism, an erasure of the past and the construction of a new, vital society. Its inherent ambiguity and absence of a singular narrative allowed for it to be stretched, adapted, and translated across cultures, classes and critical discourses. The South American appearances of concrete art then must be attended to in their specificities, but also put into comparative analysis not in order to assemble alliances and oppositions, but to better understand why concrete art sprung up in the southern hemisphere and how it was put to use. Despite different political formations, a retrieval of the artist as a social agent, enmeshed in the world, was of primary importance for both artistic groups. Moreover the art object for the Concretists and Neoconcretists took on a second life as an “animate participant” in the world. For Maldonado and the Argentines, the artwork was to be the fiber that produced a fuller union between man and culture, and as a result, transform man’s relationship to things. Gullar cried out against the factorization of man or the reduction of man to a cog in the machine when he theorized the artwork as a living, breathing organism. Invested in the primacy of the individual, Gullar’s texts did not favor the artist *or* the viewer. Instead Neoconcretism valued the lived experience at the moment of execution *and* at the moment of participation (a Möbius strip). In this way then the Concrete and Neoconcrete object held the potential for “an unlimited happiness for man,” but now one must look closer at the actual objects to determine how their construction alters the discourse and contributes to a local modernity.

¹ Tomás Maldonado, “Max Bill,” in *Max Bill* (Buenos Aires: ENV, Ed. Nueva Visión, 1955), 10. “En realidad, hace muy poco tiempo que el arte concreto ha empezado a insinuarse como una conducta estética independiente. En un principio, no aspiraba a ser, ni mucho menos, una nueva

tendencia artística; quería ser solo un nuevo modo—el mayor y más apropiado modo—de nominar la antigua tendencia artística conocida como abstracta o arte abstracto.” Ferreira Gullar, “Arte Concreta,” in *Etapas da arte contemporânea* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Revan, 1998), 213.

“Até aí não havia nenhuma diferença teórica entre *arte concreta* e *arte abstrata*, tratando-se apenas de uma opção terminológica a adoção de uma ou outra denominação.”

² Ferreira Gullar, “Da arte concreta à arte neoconcreta,” *Jornal do Brasil*, July 18, 1959, republished in Aracy Amaral, *Projeto construtivo brasileiro na arte (1950-1962)* (Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo: Museo de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro and Pinacoteca de Estado, 1977), 111.

“Assim, a principal característica da arte neoconcreta é a de tornar expressivo o vocabulário geométrico da arte concreta.”

³ Theo van Doesburg, “Comments on the basis of concrete painting,” *Art concret* (April 1930), republished in Joost Balijeu, *Theo van Doesburg* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 182.

⁴ Theo van Doesburg, “Elementarism (the elements of the new painting),” *De Stijl* (January 1932), republished in Balijeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, 185.

⁵ Van Doesburg, “Comments on the basis of concrete painting,” 182.

⁶ Van Doesburg, “Elementarism,” 185.

⁷ Van Doesburg, “Comments on the basis of concrete painting,” 182.

⁸ Ferreira Gullar, “The Neoconcrete Manifesto,” *Jornal do Brasil*, March 22, 1959, republished in “Nostalgia of the Body,” *October* 69 (Summer 1994): 94.

⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, “Existentialism is a Humanism,” 1946,

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/sartre/works/exist/sartre.htm>

¹⁰ “Manifiesto Invencionista,” *Arte Concreto-Invenición* (1946), republished in Nelly Perazzo, *El Arte concreto en la Argentina en la década del 40* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de Arte Gaglianone, 1983), 176.

¹¹ Maldonado, “Max Bill,” 10-11. “Es que, en el fondo, las obras de arte concreto, contrariamente a lo que tantas veces se ha formulado, no son solo objetos. Son también hechos. Hechos que ocurren, que fluyen. Y, lo que es importante, hechos que ocurren y que fluyen entre nosotros. Es decir, hechos que percibimos, que vemos venir o partir, a los cuales llegamos o de los cuales nos alejamos. Percepción y comunicación.”

¹² Van Doesburg, “Elementarism,” 185.

¹³ Tomás Maldonado, “Los Artistas Concretos, el ‘Realismo’ y la Realidad,” in *Escritos Preulmianos*, ed. Carlos A. Méndez Mosquera and Nelly Perazzo (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Infinito, 1997), 50. “El arte concreto es práctica. La conciencia proviene del mundo pero también opera sobre él, INVENTA. Inventar, no en el sentido de Bergson, sino en el de Marx, es decir, PRACTICA, TRABAJO.”

¹⁴ Hlito, Iommi, and Maldonado, “Texto del catálogo Exposición Arte Concreto, pinturas, esculturas, dibujos,” in Maldonado, *Escritos Preulmianos*, 69. “Y si todavía es posible denunciar en sum método creador ciertos resabios o residuos abstractos, ello se debe a que una obra de arte concreto no puede escapar—ni lo pretende—a su condición de obra humana, vale décor, de obra que el hombre ha inventado con la totalidad de su ser, con sus manos, pero también, y conviene no olvidarlo, con su capacidad de abstracción.”

¹⁵ Van Doesburg, “Comments on the basis of concrete painting,” 181-182.

¹⁶ Maldonado, “Los Artistas Concretos, el ‘Realismo’ y la Realidad,” in Maldonado, *Escritos Preulmianos*, 49. “El arte representativo no es realista; no puede serlo nunca: sólo crea fantasmas de cosas.”

¹⁷ Maldonado, “Encuesta,” in Maldonado, *Escritos Peulmianos*, 36. “Una obra de arte no debe contener, sino ser, estar.”

¹⁸ Maldonado, “Los Artistas Concretos, el “Realismo” y la Realidad,” in Maldonado, *Escritos Peulmianos*, 50. “...CONOCER efectivamente un objeto implica una ilimitada alegría para el hombre, una afirmación de su poder.”

¹⁹ “Manifiesto Invencionista,” 176.

²⁰ Hlito, Iommi, and Maldonado, “Texto del catálogo Exposición Arte Concreto, pinturas, esculturas, dibujos,” 69.

²¹ Maldonado, “Actualidad y Porvenir del Arte Concreto,” in *Escritos Peulmianos*, 78.

²² Gullar, “The Neoconcrete Manifesto,” 93.

²³ Gullar, “Arte neoconcreta,” in *Etapas da arte contemporânea*, 247. “Desligada do contexto significativo geral, a forma foi submetida ao exame de laboratório, analisada e desintegrada como uma particular física.”

²⁴ Haroldo de Campos, “The Informational Temperature of the Text,” *Poetics Today* v3 n3 (Summer 1982): 179 (Translated by Tolman), originally published in 1960.

²⁵ Van Doesburg, “Art concret. The basis of concrete painting,” 181. “4 The construction of a painting and its elements should be simple and direct in its visualization...6 Absolute clarity should be sought.”

²⁶ Jon Tolman, “The Context of a Vanguard: Toward a Definition of Concrete Poetry,” *Poetics Today* v3 no3 (Summer 1982): 155.

²⁷ Gullar, “Theory of the Non-Object,” (1959) in *Experiência neoconcreta* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007), 142.

²⁸ Gullar, “Arte neoconcreta,” 246. “Trata-se, portanto, de um problema de *significação* e não meramente de percepção.” He continues “though for Malevich *White on White* was ‘the sensation of the absence of the object’ (‘a sensibilidade da ausência do objeto’) for Doesburg a painting is an object as real as a stone.”

Mariola V. Alvarez

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PASOS CORDILLERANOS

The Argentinean - Chilean exchanges around abstract art

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In the historiography of the Argentine art, exchanges between the Argentinean abstract art and the Brazilian cultural circles are well known; nevertheless, the dialogues that concerns the Argentinean concrete art and the Chilean proposals that took place since the beginnings of the fifties, have not yet been deepened.

Without neglecting that the shaping knot of the Argentine and Chilean contacts that interested the Inventionist project were around Vicente Huidobro, our work not only considers to review those entailments but to study the development of *tactics* and *strategies* in the terms defined by Michel de Certeau. That is to say, thinking the firsts as the actions of those that do not have their own base but that act in the field of others, to later investigate the overlapping of strategies of those who developed contacts oriented to legitimize and to spread the initiatives carried out in their own operational bases (Certeau, 2001:391-425).

In this sense, our proposal is to analyze the original nucleus of the Argentinean concrete vanguard considering the artists' bonds and their project's scope, the *Primera Exposición de Arte Concreto*, in which paintings by Alfredo Hlito and Tomás Maldonado and sculptures by Enio Iommi and Claudio Girola made in 1952 were presented, the connections established by Godofredo Iommi and Girola through the Escuela de Arquitectura of Valparaíso, as well as the connections made by Esteban Eitler and Juan Jacobo Bajarlía. We also studied the contacts between Raul Lozza and Ramon Vergara Grez, the interchanges with the group *Rectángulo* and the organization of the first international exhibition *Forma y Espacio*, which took place in September 1962 with the participation of Argentinean, Chilean and Uruguayan artists.

PASOS CORDILLERANOS Argentinean-Chilean exchanges around the abstract art

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Until present, the historiography of the Latin American abstract art has not studied in depth the dialogues between Argentinean concrete art and the Chilean proposals that took place since the beginnings of the fifties. In this regard, without neglecting that the shaping knot of the Argentine and Chilean contacts that interested the *inventionist* project were around Vicente Huidobro¹, our work not only sets out to review those entailments but also focus on studying the development of *tactics* and *strategies* implemented by some artists in the terms defined by Michel de Certeau. That is to say, thinking of the former as actions by those who do not have their own base but that act in other people's field of action, we also mean to investigate the overlapping of strategic initiatives of those who cultivated contacts oriented to spread the legitimized initiatives developed in their operational bases (Certeau, 2001:391-425).

I.

* This assignment is part of the research carried out for my thesis entitled "Las utopías constructivas en la posguerra rioplatense". This paper was discussed in the International Research Forum for Graduate Students and Emerging Scholars at the University of Texas at Austin (11-07-09) and some parts of it were published in Rossi (2007:137-151). In order to write this piece, documents were taken from "Archivo Jorge Romero Brest" (F.F y L-UBA), the "Fundación Espigas", the Archive of the "Instituto de Arquitectura de la Universidad Católica de Valparaíso (IA-UCV)", the Archives of Claudio Girola, Raul Lozza y Manuel Espinosa, as well as the interview given by Francisco Kröpfl. I would like to express my gratitude to Raúl Naón for letting me use his files, to Godofredo Iommi (jr) for clearing up my doubts and to Gabriel Bajarliá for allowing me to have access to his father's files.

¹ Project based on "Arturo" magazine, from which emerged the "Movimiento de Arte Concreto-Invención", the "Asociación de Arte Concreto Invención", the "Movimiento Madí, Madinensor" and the "Perceptista" group.

The influence that Huidobro's Creationism exerted upon the youngs (whose admiration was reflected by the insertion of the poem "Una mujer baila sus sueños" in the magazine *Arturo*) was closely connected to the friendship Huidobro maintained with Torres Garcia². Nevertheless, when one considers the ensuing links, it is important not to disregard Godofredo Iommi. Uncle to the brothers Enio Iommi and Claudio Girola, Godofredo was himself a poet friend of Edgar Bayley and Arden Quin. His research at the end of the 30's aimed at renovating along the same lines as that taken by *Arturo* –especially for his admiration of Huidobro's poetry– and, in the early 40's, Iommi's presence was essential for the foundational group of such magazine.

In 1939 together with his friends Efrain Tomas Bo, Juan Raul Young and the Brazilians Gerardo Melo Mourão, Abdías do Nascimento and Napoleón Lopes Filho, Godofredo was planning to go on a trip to Europe which had to be called off due to the outbreak of World War II. Their literary interests drove them to found "La Hermandad de la Orquídea," a poetic brotherhood who met at the Buenos Aires bar "Victoria." After long debates on the plentiful works that had been produced up to that moment, they concluded that what they had written was useless, therefore they burnt all their notes in a ceremony called "Pacto de la Victoria". After the failed trip from South America to Europe, the Brotherhood resolved to explore the bowels of the continent and after going on this "Mediterranean" expedition through America, they would found a new city. At some point during the trip, and for various reasons, the group had to split and

² The Huidobro's return in 1933 has already capted the will for renovation of several Chilean plastic artists, from whom emerged the "Grupo 1933" –formed by painters and sculptures with some trajectory, critics and poets– and the "dcebristas". This Group presented the first exhibition of abstract art in December 1933 (formed by Waldo Parraguez, Jaime Dvor, Gabriela Rivadeneira y María Valencia) See: P. Lizama, s-f.

gave up founding this utopian city. On their way back to Buenos Aires, Young and Godofredo stopped at Santiago de Chile to interview Huidobro³.

When Arden Quin tried to make contact with the poet Murilo Mendes, Godofredo's three Brazilian friends set the first precedent. In this regard, Arden Quin mentioned Abdia do Nascimento's⁴ guide, who, on the other hand, was one of the contacts available due to the fact that Melo Mourão was in prison between 1942 and 1948. Although Godofredo's importance has begun to blur in Buenos Aires –because he made Chile his permanent residence⁵– we have arrived at the conclusion that he was a key figure to establish a bond between Argentina and Chilean intellectuals.

On the other hand, the circulation of Argentinean art and reviews in Chile inaugurated the 50's with a retrospective of Emilio Pettoruti's works presented by Julio E. Payró in Santiago⁶. After this exhibition, those Chileans interested in the renovation of the artistic language, were also able to study this approach in depth by attending the course which Pettoruti himself taught at the University of Chile in the summer of 1951. Among the participants were teachers and students from the College of Fine Arts, such as Hernán Gazmuri, Ramón Vergara Grez, Ana Cortés, Marta Colvin, Aida Poblete, Maria Trupper, Susana Mardonés and Elsa Bolívar⁷. In Argentina the texts which circulated were the art panoramas written by Julio Rinaldini, Juan Corradini, or Jorge Romero Brest;

³ Interruption was caused (among others) by lomme illness (malaria).

⁴ Arden Quin interview by the author, 11-24-05. On Brazilian connections in the origins of *Arturo*, see: García, 2008.

⁵ Finally he married with Ximena –Huidobro's wife– and established in Chile.

⁶ The exhibition was organized by a Committee formed by the highest authorities of cultural institutions. The curator was Chilean artist Jorge Caballero Cristi.

⁷ R. Vergara Grez, "La lección permanente de Emilio Pettoruti", in *El Mercurio*, Santiago de Chile, 7-11-71, p. 4.

the itinerary drawn by Lautaro Yankas in 1950 or the contributions by Antonio Romera in *Anuario Plástica*. Romero Brest, who had also taught a course in the University of Chile in the summer of 1943, reviewed Chilean Art and the exhibitions in “Los Salones de Viña del Mar”⁸.

II

Although these connections contributed to the diffusion of both countries art productions, it was in the “Primera Exposición de Arte Concreto” that the threshold for the interchange of Argentinean-Chilean ideas interested in the development of abstract art was reached. In 1952, the arrival in Chile of the Argentine concrete artists was preceded by the attempts to modernize the architecture teaching programs, both within the field of the “Universidad Católica de Santiago”, which summoned Josef Albers for the Chair of Plastic Art and the “Escuela de Arquitectura de Valparaíso”, where Alberto Cruz Covarrubias arrived with comprehensive reform ideas. In this last group was Godofredo Iommi, who agreed with Cruz on the idea of integrating the teaching of architecture with poetry and, in October that same year, they promoted the arrival of Alfredo Hlito and Tomás Maldonado’s paintings as well as Enio Iommi and Claudio Girola’s sculptures.

The exhibition took place in two venues: the “Hotel Miramar de Viña del Mar” (now The Sheraton) halls and the exhibition hall at the “Ministerio de Educación de Santiago” sponsored by the “Instituto de Arquitectura” de la Universidad Católica de Valparaíso (IA-UCV.) The fact that the exhibition was

⁸ Payró wrote on Chilean art in: *Arte y artistas de Europa y América*, Buenos Aires, Futuro, 1946, pp. 279-291 and Romero Brest in many articles for newspapers of Buenos Aires: *La Vanguardia*, *Argentina Libre* y *Correo Literario* (1940-44).

held in two cities and that the organizers included a closing lecture, denoted the willingness to encourage the insertion of a breakup proposal.

At the presentation in Viña, the exhibition design played with the natural landscape and the sea light, creating an exhibition space with panels placed on a rocky ledge near the Hotel bar. In Santiago, the two painters exhibited their works first and, so did the two sculptures the following week. The press emphasized that Cruz Covarrubias effort allowed the Chilean public to have access to these manifestations that used to be confined to the learned circles. Some reviews pointed out the success within the general public, highlighting the perplexity with which they stared at the works, while others regarded that explanatory lectures were necessary because spectators could not understand this new expression of the art at first sight.

The reviewers opinions dealt with genealogies which begun with the precedents in the international movements that legitimized them, even though the critics also included ironic comments about the spectators being “speechless” when they saw “twisted wire”, “figures that even a child could sketch” or, what they believed was an “impoverished” sort of art which had given up on its attempts to figuration. While some critics wondered if one should speak about concrete art, abstract art or about “new realities”, such as the French would call them, a lengthy article by painter and art critic Victor Carvacho, claimed that the command of the intellectual led to results which were purely mechanical, weakening the works artistic expression⁹ All in all, this exhibition, not only introduced Argentinean concrete art in Chile but it stirred up controversy within the Chilean artistic field, posing arguments on how to refer to

⁹ For reviews see *Ultima Hora*, *Las Últimas Noticias*, *El Debate*, *El Imperial*, *El Diario Ilustrado*, *El Mercurio* (Santiago de Chile, November 1952) and *Art d'aujourd'hui*, (Paris, march 1953).

this new kind of art, while others opposed from the trenches of figuration.

Precisely, the pro-realism artists reaction was welcomed by a privileged Chilean audience, given the fact that between April and May 1953 the “Congreso Continental de la Cultura” was celebrated in Santiago, gathering over two hundred representatives from the Communist Party from fifteen countries. Among the participants were Nicolás Guillén, Pablo Neruda, Diego Rivera y Jorge Amado, who were eager to discuss the national character and the interchanges between different Latin American cultures. The Argentinean delegation included organic intellectuals and some artists from the Communist Party¹⁰. Among them, Antonio Berni took the opportunity to denounce the fact that the Sao Paulo Biennial excluded realist art, giving advantage to abstract and non-figurative art, which Berni deemed to be in open opposition to “the current national reality”¹¹.

III.

Nevertheless, both figurative and abstract artists took part in the “Exposición Homenaje de la Sociedad Nacional de Bellas Artes de Chile a los Artistas Argentinos”, “which arrived on May 25th 1953 under the official policy of rapprochement promoted by Carlos Ibañez del Campo and Juan D. Peron’s administrations¹². In the Palace of “La Alhambra” a group of one hundred and nine paintings and fourteen sculptures ranging from Malharro and Thibón de Libian to the famous portrait “Lily” by Berni or “Sol Argentino” by Emilio Pettoruti

¹⁰ Speakers were: Héctor P. Agosti, Raúl González Tuñón y Julio Galer.

¹¹ See: “Se efectuó el Congreso Continental de la Cultura” and “Un arte humano que expresa la realidad de América”, in *La Gaceta Uruguaya*, Montevideo, a. 1, n. 3, 2-6-53.

¹² Despite “Instrucción Pública” Minister, Dr. O. Ivanissevich, who qualified abstract art as “pathological forms” or “morbid art”, Giunta noticed that some official representations included abstract works. See: Giunta (2001:74-6) and García (2004:40-5), among others.

could be seen¹³. Abstraction was represented by a group conformed by Juan Bay, Juan del Prete, Yente, Miguel Ocampo and Pablo Curatella Manes –who was in charge of the exhibition¹⁴– and by a second group which included avant gard concrete artists. Among the latter, there were oils by Maldonado, perceptists works by Raul Lozza, articulated forms by Gyula Kosice, one shaped canvas by Aníbal Biedma and two paintings and one madí sculpture by Martín Blazsko¹⁵.

In July that year, the official “channel” of interchange moved to Buenos Aires due to the Chilean President’s visit to the city for attending the “Exposición de Pintura y Escultura chilena contemporánea”. The exhibition was held within a number of activities which included galas at the Colón Theatre and various lectures on art. The official presentation protocol illustrated with a picture of Eva Peron and both Heads of states included an outline about the last fifty years of Chilean art.

Written by Víctor Carvacho, the outline remarked that although the generation of the year 1928 had been thwarted, since 1939, the social and political changes had developed a new national consciousness that had been noted in the artistic generation between 1943 and 1953. The outline also perceived that this new national consciousness essential trait was diversity and rebellion drifting towards evasion, being Balmes’ or Barrios’ expressionism,

¹³ The program included films, a poetic show, a concert by “Orquesta Sinfónica de Chile” and many lectures.

¹⁴ “Composición no figurativa” exhibited by Juan Bay (and “Naturaleza Muerta”), “Composición abstracta” and “Composición futucubista” (and “El abrazo”) by Juan Del Prete, “Pintura” (and “Naturaleza muerta” too) by Sarah Grilo, two “Pintura” by Miguel Ocampo and by Juan Otano, and “Composición futucubista” by Yente, among others.

¹⁵ “Objeto pintura” and “Pintura perceptista” exhibited by Lozza, “Escultura Madí” and “Ecuación de tres planos blancos” by Kosice, “Pintura Madí” by A. Biedma, “Desarrollo de catorce temas” and “Trayectoria de una anécdota” by Maldonado and the pictures “Armonía en verde” and “Ritmos” and the sculpture “La fuerza” by Martín Blaszko.

more freely figurations or metaphysical surrealism, which ended up in the works by Matta. For the Argentine reviews, however, the whole set was not significant. Taking into account the wonderful impression that the Chilean art exhibition which arrived in Buenos Aires in 1940 left on him, in his article published in the “Exhibition” section of *Saber Vivir* magazine Alvar Núñez enumerated a long list of absences¹⁶.

IV.

In spite of the diffusion through these official delegations which tried to expand the circulation network of the concretism aesthetic programs, Girola realized that Chile offered important opportunities to continue his projects. By 1953, Girola promoted a Milanese exhibition of “Movimiento de Arte Concreta” (MAC), a group which had been contacted in Italy¹⁷. This exhibition took place in The Miramar Hotel and in the “Ministerio de Educación de Santiago”, with a prologue by Gillo Dorfles. The text written by this member of the Milanese group stressed that Italian concrete art had manifested itself in 1933 when “La Galeria del Milione” showed paintings by Soldati, Veronesi and Munari, among others, although it remained in the shadows because in those days- with a nationalistic atmosphere- the paintings by the group “Novecento” were more successful. Nonetheless, Monnet, Munari, and Dorfles himself had founded the MAC, which was supported by the “Bergamini” art gallery and the “Salto” bookshop, where Girola himself exhibited his works while staying in Italy.

¹⁶ Alvar Núñez, “Exposiciones”, in *Saber Vivir*, a. IX, n. 105, Buenos Aires, jul-ago-sept de 1953, p. 43.

¹⁷ As A. Cruz Cobarrubias y F. Kröpfl said to us, to whom we are specially grateful. In January 1953 the MAC was present in the “Museo de Arte Moderna de San Pablo”, in April 1953 by Works of Allosia, Biglione, Di Salvatore, Dorfles, Mazzon, Mesciulan, Monnet, Munari, Nigro and Parisot Works were presented in Krayd of Buenos Aires, under the title of “Pintores italianos contemporáneos, grupo m.a.c. de milán” and, in August, in Chile as “Movimiento Arte Concreta”, with the auspicious of the IA-UCV.

“Study of the movement of a useless machine” was chosen for the cover of the catalogue in the Chilean exhibition by MAC, which bore proof of the close and lively nature of the Italian contacts, since it was also included in the Milanese group’s bulletin together with a text which announced an exhibition of paintings and useless machines by Munari in Bergamini. Likewise, Dorflies’ interest in interdisciplinary works was reflected in the Buenos Aires magazine *Nueva Visión*, directed by Maldonado, which included interdisciplinary works by Dorflies on the relations between dodecaphonic music and concrete art and about the links between art and architecture. What is more, the “Arte y Estética” collection from the *Nueva Vision* publishers, directed by Hlito and Francisco Bullrich, published a whole book on Dorflies, focusing on interdisciplinary approaches to art¹⁸.

After these interchanges, Girola often travelled to Valparaíso and started to integrate himself in that cultural environment, while as a member of “Grupo de Artistas Modernos de la Argentina”, he exhibited his works not only in Buenos Aires but also in Brazil¹⁹. In March 1956 he was appointed to work in the “Instituto de Arquitectura de UCV”, where he was definitely based and was determined to look for new alternatives that soon were part of other collective projects.

Esteban Eitler also became a contact with concrete avant-garde Argentinean art. In 1936, this Austrian composer had arrived in Buenos Aires, where he became a member of “Agrupación Nueva Música” directed by Juan

¹⁸ G. Dorflies, “Sobre algunas interferencias entre las artes”, in *nueva visión*, Buenos Aires, n. 5, 1954, pp. 30-31 and *Constantes técnicas de las artes*, Buenos Aires, Nueva Visión, 1958.

¹⁹ From the impulse of Aldo Pellegrini, this Group was formed by concret artists: Girola, Hlito, Iommi, Maldonado y Lidy Prati and independents: Aebi, Fernández Muro, Sarah Grilo y Ocampo. In August 1953 it was presented in the “Museo de Arte Moderno do Rio de Janeiro”, with Clorindo Testa and Rafael Onetto as guest artists. On October 1953 it was presented in Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam, but without Iommi and Girola’s works.

Carlos Paz. Then his music and drawings participated in the first Madí meetings, and once the group was divided, Eitler's name was present both, in the activities of the stream led by Kosice and the one led by Arden Quin²⁰. However, in 1952, he decided to settle down in Santiago, where he pursued his research into music experimentation²¹. In addition, in Chile he composed a dodecaphonic piece based on the book "La Gorgona" by Juan Jacobo Bajarlía, which was released in November 1953. It was precisely this poet, who adhered to the invencionist program, who had established early contacts with the Chilean literature field, especially through his friendship with Antonio de Undurraga.

Since August 1948 Bajarlía directed the *Contemporánea, la revolución en el arte* magazine where the music, the art and the poetry of concrete groups and Undurraga's poems and correspondence had a prominent place. By the middle of the decade, while Bajarlía's theoretical production circulated within the academic Chilean milieu, he travelled to Chile where he took contact with the writers Mila Oyarzun, Herbert Müller, and the surrealists Braulio Arenas, Enrique Gómez Correa and his close friend Undurraga. He also used this opportunity to receive the konzert-muzik "Die Gorgone" from Eitler himself and to meet people related to Huidobro's works²².

²⁰ He was included in the Studio of Blaszkó (Street Cabrera, March 1948) and he exchanged mails with Arden Quin. His works were presented in the exhibitions with Kosice at the Galerías Los Independientes (1954), Bonino (1956) and Denise René (1958), some of them representing Chile. Eitler died in 1960

²¹ Kita Eitler justified moving to Chile by saying that thought his father wasn't a very active communist, his radio Works had troubles with Eva Duarte de Perón. See: Y. Zehner, "Esteban (Stefan) Eitler zwischen Europa und Lateinamerika", *A Global View of Mozart*, Salzburg, Land, 2006, p. 91.

²² See: J.J. Bajarlía, "Origen y cronología del vanguardismo poético" in *Atenea*, of the Universidad de Concepción, 1952 and *La polémica Huidobro-Reverdy*.

V.

In addition to the exhibitions and the appearances in magazines in both countries, in July 1962, another action node appeared that helped the interests of those who promoted the abstract trend when they submitted their works in the “1ª Muestra Internacional Forma y Espacio”, at the “Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Santiago”. The exhibition –organized by the “Instituto de Extensión de Artes Plásticas de la Universidad de Chile” under the advice of Ramón Vergara Grez– sent out invitations to constructivist artists from Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. The organizers meant to include topics ranging from Cubists techniques of decomposing objects into planes to Kinetic art. The selection of artists intended to highlight the pioneers from each country: Pettoruti, Hernán Gazmuri and Torres García, even though Torres García’s works could not be shown in the end.

On the one hand, the exhibition tried to confront the constructive art results from the region, making it clear that, although the works origins were to be found in the European *isms*, “those original doctrines disintegrated when crossing the Atlantic”²³. Most of the Argentinean participants belonged to groups which struggled for the consolidation of abstract art: Raúl Lozza and Manuel Espinosa founded the “Asociación Arte Concreto-Invención”, Eugenio Abal, José Rodrigo Beloso, Domingo Di Stefano and Pedro Gaeta represented the geometric trend within the “Arte no Figurativo” group, Eduardo Mac Entyre and Miguel Ángel Vidal had presented their “Arte Generativo” through their manifesto signed in September 1960, whilst Oscar Capristo, Horacio Martínez Ferrer, María Martorell and Mónica Soler-Vicens were independent abstracts.

²³ Vergara Grez, “Introducción”, in *1ª Muestra Internacional Forma y Espacio*, Universidad de Chile, July 1962.

Between 1956 and 1961 the Chilean artists Elisa Bolívar, Luis Diharce, Virginia Huneus de Vera, Matilde Pérez, Gustavo Poblete, James Smith and Vergara Grez, worked within an abstraction which prioritized structure, rhythm, and artistic qualities and worked, mostly, within the “Rectángulo” group²⁴. Since 1952, the Uruguayan José Costigliolo, Maria Freire, Antonio Llorens, Lincoln Presno and José Alberto Saint-Romain were part of the Montevidean group “Arte no Figurativo” and they continued creating in that line of work.

On the other hand, as the Headmaster of the University’s presentation had anticipated, the Uruguayans, the Argentineans and Chileans who participated in “Forma y Espacio” were fiercely stood up against Expressionist or Informalist lyricism²⁵. These artists subscribed to a Manifesto in which they agreed to stay together in a Constructivist artists front since they believed this tendency would be the only one that would integrate art, man and community²⁶. At the end of the exhibition, they resolved to give the show a permanent character and planned to have a new gathering in Argentina.

To this end a “biennial” organizing committee was formed which would gather at the “Sociedad Argentina de Artistas Plásticos” (SAAP), different positions were assigned among the participants and, what is more, it was agreed to incorporate moving sculptures²⁷. One of the lines of action meant to get halls from the “Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes” in Buenos Aires, which was

²⁴ Excepted Luis Diharce, this artists were in “Rectángulo”, formed on the basis of “Grupo de los Cinco”, (where Ximena Cristi, Matilde Pérez, Aída Poblete, Sergio Montecino y Vergara Grez worked since 1953). “Rectángulo” open th public discusión to other fields, inviting poets and musicians and, after five years, started the “Movimiento Forma y Espacio”.

²⁵ L. Oyarzun, “Bienvenida”, *1ª Muestra Internacional...*, *cit.*

²⁶ “Manifiesto de los pintores Constructivos de Argentina, Chile y Uruguay. Chile”, September 1962.

²⁷ Three Secretaries were elected: Raúl Lozza, Miguel Ángel Vidal and Pedro Gaeta, two Treasurers: Eugenio Abal y Di Stéfano and M. Ferrer for Foreign Relations.

being directed by Romero Brest. The director of the Museum not only supported the initiative but suggested to include European artists offering to write and send the invitations himself. Lozza and Beloso headed for Uruguay and Brazil to establish institutional contacts. First, they agreed to have contests and thought of ways of sending the works to Buenos Aires, the Argentine artists also managed to get a group of fifteen Carioca artists in the SAAP halls and to launch an exhibition of Lozza, Abal and Beloso's in Río de Janeiro²⁸. Knowing about these negotiations, Vergara Grez wrote to Lozza:

Have you contacted the Uruguayan painters? Have you talked to them about our purpose to unite Latin America under an elevated and dignified art concept, whose basis would be "constructivist"? [...] We'd like to point out the need that this avant-garde exhibition does not limit the possibilities to the so-called "concrete art" [...] All the approaches could be welcomed as long as they reject chaos and fear or panic that has swept all over the world and does not allow people to live naturally²⁹.

Without doubt, among the artists, it was essential to discuss issues inherent to the aesthetic line, in order to define those productions that, by the mid-fifties, were considered to be part of constructivism. As far as these artists were concerned, to build a front based on constructivist abstraction meant taking an active position against Informalism. Instead, for Romero Brest, the focus was on the insertion of Latin American art in international scheme. Nonetheless, while these discussions were making headway, Romero Brest was dismissed from his position as Director and was replaced by Samuel Oliver –his successor– who stated that "he was not willing to provide the halls of the

²⁸ From work notes they interviewed the "Directora de Artes y Letras" of *El País* of Montevideo, the "Director do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo", the "Directora do Museu de Arte Moderna de Rio de Janeiro" and the "Secretaria de Assuntos Culturais de Brasil, Rosalía de Leao".

²⁹ "es que tomaste contacto con los pintores uruguayos? Les hablaste de nuestro propósito de unir a nuestra América con un concepto del arte digno y elevado, cuyas bases fueran "constructivas"? [...] Nos gustaría plantear desde acá la necesidad que esta muestra de arte de vanguardia no limite las tentativas sólo al llamado "arte concreto" [...] Todas las búsquedas podrían tener cabida siempre que rechazaran el caos o el miedo o temor que ha cogido a una buena parte del orbe y que no les deja vivir naturalmente". See: Letter of R. Vergara Grez at Lozza, Santiago, 25-5-63.

Museum for an exhibition of paintings whose artistic trend was of no interest”.³⁰ This decision turned out to be decisive as this proposed biennial was finally cancelled. If it would have been held, the biennial would have emerged as a strategic action organized by the artists to state positions achieved by Constructivist art in the Southern cone.

In any case, in October 1965, there was an exhibition held in R o de Janeiro showing the above mentioned Argentine painters: Perceptist works by Lozza; paintings with clean forms organized by dynamic lines by Abal; and works built with a strong geometric structure –although free from the mathematical rigour– by Beloso³¹.

VI.

As far as Girola was concerned, his sculptures had been going through various stages until he achieved more open propositions, while his teaching stressed the importance on integrating special issues with poetry³². In 1965, the group interdisciplinary of Valparaiso incorporated the “Traves as por Am rica” in its syllabus as a poetic recognition of the Latin American continent. These ideas had been influenced by the “Phal nes” or poetic act by Godofredo Iommi in Paris and documented in the magazine *Allieurs* which was directed by Arden Quin³³. After the first *Traves ia* with the students from the Institute the trip known as “Amereida” –an Eneid for South America–, an idea to create an open city

³⁰ See: [A ra z de la exposici n internacional], s-d. About Oliver’s administration, see: Serviddio (2009:45-61).

³¹ See: “Abal, Beloso, Lozza: Exposi o comemorativa del IV centen rio” Museu de Arte Moderna de Rio de Janeiro, 09-16 at 10-17-1965.

³² In 1991, the artist himself marked eight phases in his works. About Girola’s sculpture: Crispiani (2007:169-79) and Brunson (2007:73-89).

³³ In this *phal nes* (based on the butterflies burned by the light that attracts them) the poet won public space to invite to a game in which players were listened their own language lightened by the poetic words.

“Ciudad Abierta” came up and, finally in 1972, that dream came true on the coast of Ritoque, which could be regarded as a recovery of the utopian foundation that Godofredo and his poet friends had planned at the beginning of the forties.

While Godofredo Iommi, Bajarlía and Esteban Eithers’ efforts focused on the interconnection with other Latin American artists and the reinsertion of their experiences in a regional framework, Girola and Lozza put up some resistance. Both artists came from the Concrete art group, made Chile their work base in two different moments for the development of Latin American abstraction. In the early fifties, when the Concrete avant-guard utopia had declined, Girola placed his workshop and integrated his work as a sculptor with the pedagogic work at the Architecture institute. Without doubt, both lines of action were the consequence of the same interdisciplinary work environment. In this regard, the fact that he chose to relocate his aesthetic exploration base could be understood as a tactic answer –in Certeau’s terms– to the fact that his own work had been neglected or ignored in Argentina’s artistic field. At an early stage, then, Girola was the protagonist of a tactical advance in someone else’s field of work, which allowed him to mingle with a group of artists interested in giving shape to a new proposal that, by definition, we consider resembled the utopian project of the Argentinean concrete avant-guard.

All in all, the constructivist artists who took part in “Forma y Espacio” belonged to active groups. Not only had they created their own programs and intervened in aesthetic debates but they had also acquired local prestige. However, in the 60’s, the ways of diffusion of Latin American art were in full expansion. While the São Paulo Biennial consolidated its legitimating role,

various private initiatives were also joining the consecrating circle and most of the abstract works already legitimated in Central countries were obtaining more visibility³⁴. The actions taken by this group interested in a biennial meeting can be interpreted as a strategy over those groups which aimed at segregating them. In our view, therefore, these actions not only allow us to analyze the Argentinean-Chilean interchanges, but they also let us study the reorientation of practices arising from the Río de la Plata concrete post war avant-guard, within a broader regional pattern.

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³⁴ For example: Premios Nacionales e Internacionales del Instituto Torcuato Di Tella (1960-69), Bienales Americanas de Arte of Industrias Kaiser Argentina (1962-66) and Instituto General Electric (1963-69) in the Uruguay or the Chilean companies Refinería de Azúcar, Acero del Pacífico o ESSO, among others.

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**1959-1968: Lygia Clark and the Brazilian Avant-garde in Germany and
Switzerland, a Survey**

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Abstract

Brazilian artist Lygia Clark was one of the few Latin American artists who also exhibited in German speaking European countries during the late 1950 and 1960s. Even though the reception of Latin American artists in France and Great Britain has been scholarly researched, it has remained rather unexplored in German speaking countries. During the period which is discussed in this paper there was a rising interest of neo-concrete, op and kinetic art within the ongoing debate on modernist architecture and concrete poetry that developed in Germany around Max Bense and the Stuttgart school, Max Bill at the Bauhaus Ulm, and around the curator and art historian Udo Kultermann whose close network of museum professionals and artists helped to shape the exhibition program of Galerie Thelen in Essen, founded in 1965. This article explores the different relationships of promoters and the exhibitions where Lygia Clark and her fellows were exhibited in changing contexts. Taking the case of Lygia Clark among others my research interests lie on the one hand in the history of personal relationships and networks that made these exhibitions possible in the first place, and on the other in a changing German reception and contextualisation of Clark's oeuvre from the neo-concrete paintings to the bichos and the participatory work "A Casa é o Corpo" transported from Venice Biennial to Galerie Thelen in Essen in 1968.

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The history of Brazilian art in German-speaking countries starts prominently with a cultural exchange between the Brazilian government and the German embassy in Rio de Janeiro. After the exhibition *Masterworks of the Museu de Arte São Paulo*¹ which showed European art of the São Paulo collection and was held at the Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf in 1954, a new exhibition was organized five years later by the new MAM in Rio de Janeiro which then had a completely new focus: contemporary Brazilian art. This exhibition is my point of departure to show some selected traces of interaction between Latin American, respectively Brazilian and European concrete art. I am also very interested in lines of argumentation which were taken up in order to introduce Brazilian art to a contemporary German and Swiss audience. In this context the work of Lygia Clark is a very apt case as her oeuvre underwent several stages of development and her theoretical impetus to Brazilian and Latin American art in general is pivotal. Taking into consideration those scholars and curators who were involved in this process of exchange and support it is also illuminating to unfold a map of influences, interests and discourses in order to understand the particular role Brazilian art started to play within European culture.

Seen as an introduction to this particular chapter of art history, my focus in this paper lies on few key events, the group exhibitions *Brasilianische Kunst der Gegenwart* ("Brazilian Art of Today"²) of

1959, *konkrete kunst. 50 jahre entwicklung* (“concrete art. 50 years of development”) of 1960, Lygia Clark’s monographic show at the *Studiengalerie of the Studium Generale* in Stuttgart (1964), and as a short perspective, the situation around 1968 when Clark had two of her important monographic shows: at the *Biennial* in Venice and at the M.E. Thelen Gallery in Essen.

Brazilian Art of Today had been shown in institutions in London, Paris, Munich and Vienna before going to the Museum Morsbroich in the German city of Leverkusen.³ The exhibition was divided into three sections: paintings, graphic arts and sculpture. Seven sculptors formed the smallest group of artists. Most of the exhibition consisted of paintings: 41 artists were listed as painters and 16 as graphic artists, and from the list of works reprinted in the back of the catalog it becomes quickly obvious that most of the artists came from São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro – indisputable the two centres of avant-garde art in Brazil of the time.

Ludwig Grote, general director of the German Nationalmuseum in Nürnberg then, wrote the preface of the accompanying catalog. Director of Museum Morsbroich was Udo Kultermann who will play an important role in promoting Brazilian art in Germany in the subsequent years. Even though Kultermann had no particular task in conceptualising the exhibition he hosted the travelling show. In his short introduction, Ludwig Grote developed an approach to the exhibition from his architectural background.⁴ In his opinion contemporary Brazilian art’s upswing was a consequence to the rapid development of architecture in Brazil. “Architecture is the mother of the arts”, he wrote, and Oscar Niemeyer’s and Affonso Eduardo Reidy’s buildings had been widely recognised in Europe, they “will make history of 20th century architecture”.⁵ He also recognized that the “modern language of art in Brazil is not a problem, it is far away from the [European] lament about the disrupted presence which lost its centre”⁶. Grote also pointed to the difference between Brazilian and European architecture and art asserting that it would not yet be able to express the “national characteristics”: “We see how the European schools are mirrored – but the mirror is the very immense vast tropical land (...)”.⁷

The selection of works for *Brazilian Art of Today* was made by the *Museu de arte moderna*, a museum which opened only five years before in 1954.⁸ It can be assumed that the catalog, i.e. the selection and arrangements of the plates, was made by the German museum, or even Udo Kultermann himself who was the newly appointed director.⁹ It is also illuminating to know that Kultermann not only published the book *Baukunst der Gegenwart* (“Contemporary Architecture”) in 1958, but also organized a Max Bill exhibition at the museum three months before *Brazilian Artists of Today*, running from June 19 until July 26.

The conceptual connection to modern architecture in Brazil in the exhibition *Brazilian Artists of Today* was made strikingly visible by the catalog which started with an image series of Rio and its new

museum. Even though concrete art dominated in the painting section, the catalog plates give a rather balanced impression, merging plates of native painting, l'art informel, concrete art, graphic arts and sculpture in loose groupings concluded by a list of the exhibited works.¹⁰ This list tells us that Lygia Clark (apparently) showed three paintings from 1958 and one from 1959, an average number of works within the exhibition concept.¹¹ Taking a closer look on these works, it can be reconstructed that *Unidade no. 1 a 7* was a series of seven black and white paintings Clark showed at the *1. Exposição Neoconcreta* in Rio in March 1959.¹² This is interesting insofar as neither the catalog texts, including the ample introduction of Carlos Flexa Ribeiro, professor of art history and aesthetics of University of Brazil in Rio, nor, as a consequence, local reception of the exhibition in Germany mentioned the brand-new “neo-concrete” concept.

Flexa Ribeiro defined instead three periods of contemporary art in Brazil: the first period of the “heroic” years around 1922, the second period from 1930 until the end of the second world war, and a third period from 1948 on, still unaccomplished. He also explained that Brazil had turned out to be open to “abstract art” contrary to many European countries. Therefore, as proof, academic traditions had been adopted only deficiently which in his opinion was a “natural calling” of the country to “live into the future”.¹³

Ribeiro defined the selection of the exhibition as “mainly abstract painting” of the “artistic avant-garde of the country” which showed a reference to Mondrian, Van Doesburg, Malevitsch, Pevsner and Max Bill.¹⁴ He did not mention the new rupture of the artistic concept of concrete vs. neoconcrete art – however, it is unclear if he ignored the new development or if he was not aware of it. His text, written in April 1959, coincided with the new movement as the *1. Exposição Neoconcreta* opened at the MAM in Rio in March 1959 and Ferreira Gullar’s *Manifesto neoconcreto*, co-signed by Almicar de Castro, Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, Reynaldo Jardim, Theon Spanudis and Franz Weissmann was published in the Sunday supplement of *Jornal do Brasil* on the 22nd that same month.¹⁵

The reception of the exhibition was unexpectedly positive and critics showed a strikingly curiosity towards the art coming from “overseas”.¹⁶ This is not a self-evident matter as during the 1950s art and art criticism in Germany – Laszlo Glozer spoke of “established art of the restaurative fifties”¹⁷ – was focussed not only on a “back to order” mentality, but also on a post-war existentialist “re-humanization”.¹⁸ Abstraction as a world language was not at issue anymore, but materiality was easily associated with bodily qualities,¹⁹ and the discussion of the “Menschenbild” (“view of man”)²⁰ was on top of the agenda. Critics of the Leverkusen exhibition noticed the striking preference for abstract art in this show, and even though references to European constructivism, Bauhaus and de Stijl were clearly visible, this was not criticized as an imitation but seen as a “deliberate transfer of specific Brazilian ideas” (mainly of architecture into the fine arts).²¹ Critic John Anthony Thwaites described it as a “remarkable ability, to

keep an image language fresh which is outdated in Europe and North America” and he found “extraordinary things” like Décio Viera’s compositions (“with a lot of life and tension und even a certain mysticism”), Vincent J. Ibberson’s color scale (not only achieving an “enormous luminance, but also a restrained romance in the sense of Paul Klee”) and Lygia Clark, who “invents large, square, black shapes on white. She evades applied arts and reaches monumentality (...).”²² Other reviews also pointed to the references to the art of the Bauhaus or to constructivism, nevertheless, critics considered it either fresh in terms of color, or saw a direct relationship to the building activity of Brazil claiming “that this constructive tendency allied to surface is being developed in Brazil can not least be traced back to the ample building activity in this country, [and] to architecture which is emerging from a sense of space of our time.”²³

It is no surprise that the author refers to Brazilian architecture. And it must be assumed that during the press preview and in the press release²⁴ the context between Brazilian art and architecture was stressed. As most of the reviews appeared in smaller newspapers it is likely that the reviews mirror the information provided by the museum.²⁵ However, as clarified before, the new concept of *neococoncretism* was completely ignored or unknown.

One year later, another exhibition was opened: *konkrete kunst. 50 jahre entwicklung*. It was on view at Helmhaus in Zurich, the “kunsthalle” of the city of Zurich of that time and a branch of the prestigious Museum of Fine Arts. This show was conceived by Swiss artist, designer and architect Max Bill (1908-1994). Bill came to prominence in Brazil in the early 1950s when he had his first exhibition at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo in 1950²⁶ and won the prestigious International Prize for Sculpture at the *1. Bienal de São Paulo*, showing *Unidade Tripartida* (1948/49) one year later in 1951. In 1953, he returned to Brazil twice. At the invitation of the Brazilian government Bill held lectures at the MAM in Rio and at the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Development of the University of São Paulo, entitled “The Architect, Architecture and Society.”²⁷ Bill’s influence on Brazilian artists is a well-known chapter of the art history of the country,²⁸ and it is particularly his artistic personality which inspired several artists move to Europe, among them Mary Viera and Almir Mavignier.²⁹ An exhibition proposal of Swiss concrete artist Richard Paul Lohse (1902-1988) formed the basis of *konkrete kunst: 50 jahre entwicklung*. Correspondence illustrates that Lohse wanted to organize an exhibition on “Zurich concrete art” including works of Camille Graeser, Verena Loewensberg, Fritz Glarner, himself and “a symbolic representation with 1-2 works” of Max Bill.³⁰ This proposal had already been approved by the director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Zurich.³¹ An internal paper illustrates retrospectively that Lohse actually wanted to have a monographic show – which was not considered possible at that moment. In return a thematic show on concrete art came into discussion. Lohse himself brought Max Bill into play and it was Bill in the end who took over responsibility to develop the unorthodox concept of this thematic exhibition which should

“not only be a pure art exhibition, but an event which also includes documents, texts, explanations on the development of [concrete] painting.”³²

konkrete kunst featured 168 works created from 1910 – 1960 by 114 artists, coming from the US, Latin America and several European countries, starting with works from Kandinsky,³³ Kupka, Balla, Delaunay and Vantongerloo.³⁴ Nowadays, the exhibition is considered a “tactic manoeuvre to free concrete art from its position of defence into which it had found itself since the international breakthrough of Abstract Expressionism in 1945.”³⁵ Bill’s preface of the exhibition catalog makes clear that he expanded enormously his own concept of concrete art³⁶ and also replaced the former idea of “form” to “structure” for the first time³⁷ in order to escape a too narrow reading of the concrete art concept. Bill also argued polemically against *documenta 2* of 1959 which he names a “deluge” having developed from *documenta 1*, an “unsystematic monster show” itself.³⁸

Analyzing this exhibition within the context discussed in this paper, one could highlight Bill’s urge to advocate the understanding of concrete art not as a “self-contained category” but a still fresh and growing movement.³⁹ Next to his polemic introduction the selection of works demonstrates the broadened context under which Bill summarized concrete art, including not only a large number of artists from São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro,⁴⁰ but also from the US (Ellsworth Kelly, Agnes Martin, Ad Reinhardt, Mark Tobey), even including one prominent representative of the French Tachisme, Georges Mathieu. Considering the exhibition’s relationship to *Brazilian Art of Today* and the time when these exhibitions took place (namely on the acme of the concrete/neo-concrete discourse in Brazil), and taking a look from the curatorial side it becomes obvious how the prominent hassle about these art theories in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro was left out. Bill’s focus was, and I want to stress that point, to broaden the idea of concrete art in order to show its vitality. It was not in his intention to include any another concept such as new *neoconcretismo*. According to Margit Weinberg Staber, Bill’s collaborator of the Zurich exhibition, “Latin American art was simply integrated generally into concrete art. You have to know, one did not make any big research, this was not demanded for an exhibition. This is visible from the catalog. It was not up for discussion that somebody traveled the world to see artists and to research contexts. It was simply a summary of the material received by networking and word of mouth up to 1960.”⁴¹ This can also be seen when one throws a glance at the documents that accompanied the exhibition: the manifesto of the Futurists, the catalog of the pioneering exhibition *Konkrete Kunst* at Kunsthalle Basel of 1944 and a number of magazines⁴². That the manifestos of the Brazilians were missing could have had another, quite striking reason: it was written against all kinds of “concret-rationalist” art which is, after the neoconcretists, conceived as a “machine” or “an objective body in an objective space” – and was therefore not conform at all to Max Bill and the famous conception of the HfG Ulm.

The Zurich exhibition distinguishes itself from the Leverkusen show by its different approach: whereas the German show, clearly a group show of Brazilian art, stressed the Latin American country as an upcoming place of creation, also in respect of its new architecture, the Swiss exhibition's aim was to provide a historical overview, re-define the notion of concrete art and defend it against the more subjective i.e. expressive abstraction and figuration of the 1950s.⁴³ Latin Americans played a subordinate role even though their number was relatively high compared to other artists' nations. Only two press reviews mention their inclusion.⁴⁴ Furthermore, *konkrete kunst* disclosed a certain trait of self-historization pushed forward by Max Bill who did – as a matter of course – represented himself with six works from 1933/35 to 1959.⁴⁵ Only Georges Vantongerloo showed more, i.e. nine, paintings and sculptures. Only these two artists were able to display works that got created over a longer period of time which in itself could be considered little retrospectives within the exhibition as a whole. Once we decode the agenda of this exhibition it does not come as a surprise that one will hardly find any mention of the Latin American group of artists in the press reviews. Only retrospectively Bill's selection for the show could be seen as visionary – mainly because he integrated artists like Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica – artists with a “world-wide reputation today” – (next to the American hard edge painters) to the show.⁴⁶ Another explanation why Bill did not stress the possible reception of concrete art through architecture was his own critical attitude towards Brazilian architecture, namely Oscar Niemeyer's. His talk “The Architect, Architecture and Society” held in Brazil in 1953 was a precise attack on new architecture like Rio's “Public Health Building” which in Bill's view were examples of dysfunctional buildings taking not into account the specific characteristics of the environment and the climate.⁴⁷

The two exhibitions of 1959 and 1960 were manifestations of a Brazilian-German phenomenon made public. Even though their realizations were very different, their cultural background seems to have been nourished from the same ground. The emergence of Brazilian art – and Lygia Clark's oeuvre in particular – in Germany and Switzerland as unexpectedly as it might have appeared to the general public, had its explicable roots. And these connections were also at hand when the movement continued to develop until the end of the 60s. What follows here is a very reductive description of key protagonists and places.

Max Bill was unquestionable the first to get in contact with the Brazilian art world on a professional basis. In 1952 Bill met Max Bense⁴⁸ in Germany first at the Adult Education Center (“Volkshochschule”). One year later Bense became professor of philosophy and science theory at the newly founded HfG Ulm which was conceived and managed by Bill. Students like Almir Mavignier, who met Max Bill through Mário Pedrosa in Zurich and who was invited by Bill to his studio at the same time in 1953,⁴⁹ decided to study in Ulm.⁵⁰ Eugen Gomringer, another protagonist, became private secretary of Bill (1954-1957) and founded, together with Dieter Roth and Marcel Wyss, the International Journal for Concrete Art and Design, *Spirale*, a Swiss magazine inspired by concrete art and the idea of an amalgam of “architecture,

photography, product design and poetry.”⁵¹ Concrete poetry played an immense role in bringing together all kinds of interested parties – most prominently Max Bense. He started to travel extensively to Brazil in the early 60s and was well acquainted with the *Noigandres* group around Haroldo de Campos. Whereas in Leverkusen an interest in Brazilian architecture was visible,⁵² Ulm and Stuttgart became, personalized by Gomringer and Bense, the centers of concrete poetry. Udo Kultermann, who organized the Brazilian exhibition in Leverkusen in 1959, was well acquainted with Bill,⁵³ and also met Bense in May 1961 when he was invited by Kultermann to the “Morsbroich Culture Days”.⁵⁴ Bense himself traveled to Brazil four times: 1961, 1962, 1963 and 1964. During his second travel he met Lygia Clark in her studio and reencountered her again one year later.⁵⁵ Out of these meetings Clark was invited to show her *bichos* and one *Casulo* at the *Studiengalerie* of the *Studium Generale* at the Polytechnic of Stuttgart.⁵⁶ At that moment Clark explained (provoked by an argument about the hanging respectively the presentation of the *bichos*) that “a importância era a *participação do espectador* etc., etc.”⁵⁷ However, Bense’s focus was different. He was particularly interested in Clark’s work as a model case of his theory of the “Brazilian Intelligence” which was characterized by the “mobile principle”. He declared Clarks *bichos* – “variable objects” – to mark the bridge to the new kinetic art, distinguishing the objects as “establishment of contact” and “form of use”⁵⁸ – at that time using rather precise words without knowing how close Clark’s work would develop into this direction in the future.

Lygia Clark's reception in Europe became broader after she had exhibited the *Bichos* since the early 60s,⁵⁹ culminating in the retrospective at the Venice Biennial in 1968 where she installed another central and new work at that time, the environment *A casa è o corpo*. Around the same time, Udo Kultermann mentioned her work in three of his art historical surveys, all published between 1967 and 1970.⁶⁰ He was also the person who made it possible that Lygia Clark could show her pieces at Gallery M. E. Thelen in Essen in December 1968 (17.12.1968-17.1.1969) after having met her personally in Venice. Michael Nickel and Karl Ernst Jöllenbeck, owners of Thelen gallery, brought *A Casa* from Venice to Essen. At the end of the 60's Clark's work had already underwent an extreme reinterpretation by the artist herself. And her work had become more and more individual and resisted categorization. It is interesting to see that the German reception of her second work group which focused on participation was much dependent on the mediation of her advocates.

Going through Clark's reviews in Europe during the 60s, it can be retraced that her work was received as a particular form of concrete art in the German-speaking countries (as seen in the group exhibitions of 1959 and 1960), and space and time dimensions of her *bichos* were mainly associated to kinetic or movement art in French and British art criticism. More avant-gardistic writers like Kultermann managed to grasp Clark's *bichos*, *máscaras* and *a casa*, as exhibited at the Thelen gallery show, at its heart, as can be seen in his gallery text: “(...) the exchange of the viewer into a co-creator, the activation of the creative possibilities that are present in the viewer but have only now been recognized, is fundamental to the

artist's work. Her contribution marks a step to overcome art, and mass creativity that is still mostly seen as utopian can only be reached and obtained with the help of the artist (...).⁶¹ Nevertheless, Clark's spectatorship activation was also heavily misunderstood as a play for children that does not evoke any "intellectual stimuli"⁶², and this misunderstanding is still today a difficult moment in the reception of her later work.⁶³

As I hoped to make clear Lygia Clark's work was shown in interestingly different contexts from 1958-1968 and provoked interpretations stemming from a diverse range of backgrounds. The case of Lygia Clark is illuminating insofar as one can see the problematic of interpretation and categorization which is done by third parties; on the other hand it also demonstrates the openness and complexity of the work which can be considered a challenging quality today. It is also one of many examples how Brazilian art was introduced into a European framework. Taking into account the movement of *anthropophagia* which took place in Brazil in the 60s and 70s, and this might be heretical, German and Swiss art made similar use of the "other's" cultural power by adopting it into its (Western) framework in order to reach its own goals. However, with one important difference: the impossibility to properly understand and integrate the newness and particular lifelines of Brazilian art (and art theory) which now, after half a century, has been continuously recognized as an important contribution to global art. This paper was written to introduce readers into the personal network of some protagonists involved in bringing Brazilian art to Europe and give some insight into the diverse – and here only roughly outlined – understandings of concrete art. Many fields of research are still undiscovered. It would be particularly interesting to analyze more deeply *neoconcrete* art's impact on the circle of designers and poets of the HfG Ulm where many Brazilians studied or taught. And it would be illuminating to know more about the exchange of ideas which can be hopefully reconstructed – if possible at all in an only rudimentary way these days – by the parallel interpretation of the text and image production of the opinion leaders of that period.

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¹ „Meisterwerke aus dem Museu de Arte in São Paulo,“ Düsseldorf, Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, August 29 – October, 1954

² If not indicated otherwise, the translations of all German texts and titles are mine.

³ The exhibition was open from Nov 11, 1959 – Jan. 10, 1960. The catalog of Leverkusen provides no precise information on the other exhibitions except that they were held before the Leverkusen show. Newspaper reviews also give an unclear impression, not mentioning London as an exhibition venue for example.

⁴ As a well-known art historian and conservator of the Gemäldegalerie in Dessau he was responsible to negotiate the controversial relocation of the Bauhaus from Weimar to Dessau with Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe in the early 1930s.

⁵ Ludwig Grote, "Vorwort," in *Brasilianische Künstler* (Leverkusen: Museum Morsbroich, 1959), unpaginated.

- 6 Ibid. Grote refers to Hans Sedlmayr's controversial book *Art in Crisis: The Lost Center* (s.l.: Hollis and Cater: 1957) in which Sedlmayr critiques modernity as a loss of culture. However controversial the book was received it encouraged the discourse on contemporary modern art at that time.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 The museum was conceived by Affonso Eduardo Reidy and inaugurated in 1954.
- 9 The catalog does not tell who was the editor. It is noted that the exhibition was organized of the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro in conjunction with the Museum Morsbroich in Leverkusen. The German museum is mentioned on the frontispiece below the title which leads to the assumption that it was edited and printed in Germany.
- 10 Paintings: Antonio Bandeira Paris, Paulo Becker, Flavio de Carvalho, Aluisio Carvão, Lothar Charoux, Lygia Clark, Waldemar Cordeiro, Milton Dacosta, Cicero Dias Paris, Emiliano di Caralcanti, Djanira (da Motta de Silva), Hermelindo Fiaminghi, Sanson Flexor, Mauro Francini, Clara Heteny, Vincent J. Ibberson, Frans Krajcberg, Judith Lauand, Mauricio Nogueira Lima, Mandabu Mabe, Aloisio Magalhaes, Aldemir Marlius, Amir Mavignier, Yolanda Mohaly, Teresa Nicolao, Rayhum do Nogueira, Abraham Palatnik, Inima de Paula, Ioio Persio, Caudido Portinari, Maria Helena Andres Ribeiro, Paulo Rissone, Firmina Saldanha, Oone Saldanho, Ivan Serpa, Mario Silesio, Jose Antonio da Silva, Elisa Martins da Silveira Piani, Flavio Shiro Tanaka Paris, Decio Vieria, Alfredo Volpi, Graphic arts: Livio Abramo, Edith Behring, Maria Bonomi, Mário Carneiro, João Luiz Chaves, Oswaldo Goeldi, Marcelo Grassmann, Anna Letícia, José Lima, Vera Mindlin, Fayga Ostrower, Lygia Pape, Arnaldo Pedroso d'Horta, Rossine Perez, Arthur Luiz Piza, Lasar Segall; sculpture: Mário Cravo Júnior, Kásmer Féjer, Bruno Giorgi, Maria Martins, Luiz Sacilotto, Zélia Salgaod, Franz Weissmann.
- 11 The catalog entry reads: "Planos em superficie modulada (série B no. 3), 84 x 84 cm, 1958 (reprinted in the catalog); Unidade no. 1 a 7, 30 x 30 cm, 1958; Espaço modulado no. 4, 50 x 50 cm, 1958; Espaço modulado no. 2, 59 x 59 cm, 1959." *Brasilianische Künstler* (Leverkusen: Museum Morsbroich, 1959), 71.
- 12 The other paintings exhibited in Leverkusen were *Planos em superficie modulada (série B no. 3)* (84 x 84 cm, 1958, reprinted in the catalog), *Espaço modulado no. 4* (50 x 50 cm, 1958) and *Espaço modulado no. 2* (59 x 59 cm, 1959).
- 13 Carlos Flexa Ribeiro, "Einleitung" ("Introduction"), in *Brasilianische Künstler* (Leverkusen: Museum Morsbroich, 1959), 15-21: 19.
- 14 "The exhibition consists for the most part of abstract painting, in her different implementations, the field of artistic avant-garde of the country. Next to Alfredo Volpi, Milton Dacosta and Ivan Serpa, who base their aesthetics on own research; there is a large group of artists of the "non-figurative" who are concerned with geometric and geometrical deviation, a tendency stemming from Mondrian, Van Doesburg, Malevitch, Pevsner, Max Bill and their successors." Ibid., XX.
- 15 English translation appeared in *Time & Place: Rio de Janeiro 1956-1964*, ed. Paulo Venancio Filho and Annika Gunnarsson (Stockholm: Moderna museet, 2008), 54-58. The facsimile of the exhibition catalog is reprinted in Ferreira Gullar, *Experiência neoconcreta : momento-limite da arte* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007).
- 16 Irmela Thomas, „Frischer Wind aus Übersee," *Soester Anzeiger*, date unknown.
- 17 "Wir hatten von den Künstlern gelernt ... Ein Interview mit Laszlo Glozer von Sigrid Ruby," in *Texte zur Kunst*, 50 (June, 2003), <http://www.textezurkunst.de/50/einleitung/> (10.2009). Glozer curated with Kasper König the controversial exhibition on art of the 2nd half of the 20th century, *Westkunst* (1981).
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Susanne Leeb, "Die Aufgabe der Fünfziger. Einleitung," in *Texte zur Kunst*, 50 (June, 2003), <http://www.textezurkunst.de/50/einleitung/> (10.2009).
- 20 Harriet Weber-Schäfer, "Abstrakt oder Figurativ? Das abstrakte Menschenbild in der französischen und deutschen Kunststheorie nach 1945," in *In die Freiheit geworfen*, ed. Martin Schieder and Isabelle Ewig (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2006), 205-228.
- 21 Horst Richter, "Zwischen Wolkenkratzern und Urwäldern," *Kölner Stadtanzeiger*, Dec 3, 1959.
- 22 John Anthony Thwaites, "Brasilianische Überraschungen," *Deutsche Zeitung*, Dec 12, 1959.
- 23 G-T, "Die Kunst der Brasilianer," *Bonner Rundschau*, Dec 1, 1959.
- 24 The press release is neither conserved from the museum nor at the city archive of Leverkusen.
- 25 Among those who wrote, John Anthony Thwaites is seen as the more professional. Compared to his positive response to some of the Brazilians, he considered Max Bill's influence to e.g. Almir Mavignier's painting "catastrophic". John Anthony Thwaites, "Brasilianische Überraschungen," *Deutsche Zeitung*, Dec 12, 1959.
- 26 Mário Pedrosa, "A Bienal de Cá para Lá," in *Arte Brasileira Hoje*, ed. Ferreira Gullar (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1973), 3-64: 35; Eduard Hüttinger, *Max Bill* (Zürich: ABC-Verlag, 1977), 214. Udo Kultermann reports that the cultural exchange between Brazil and German-speaking Europe started with Bill's exhibition in 1950. e-mail message to the author, August 13, 2009.

- 27 Max Bill, “architect, architecture and society” (1953), reprinted in *Oscar Niemeyer - eine Legende der Moderne = a legend of modernism*, ed. Andreas, Paul (Frankfurt am Main: Deutsches Architekturmuseum; Basel: Birkhäuser 2003), 115-122. On his second trip he was a jury member of the Great Architecture Prize of São Paulo.
- 28 To quote Pedrosa again: “Bill nos dava um conjunto completo de toda sua obra, desde as séries em progressão de formas geométricas elementares, o processo das aproximações cromáticas de limite-não-limite até as construções espaciais fundadas em figuras topológicas como a fita de Moebius, de onde saiu a admirável *Unidade Tripartida*, grande prêmio de escultura da Primeira Bienal de São Paulo, (...). Pode-se dizer que o importante movimento concretista brasileiro e argentino teve seu primeiro ponto de apoio nessa demonstração de Bill, então o mais insigne representante da arte concreta suíça e mundial, (...).” *Ibid.*, 35-36.
- 29 Heraldo de Campos, “Die Konkreten und die Neo-Konkreten,” in *Brasilien: Entdeckung und Selbstentdeckung: [erscheint zum Anlass der Internationalen Junifestwochen Zürich 1992]*, ed. Guido Magnaguagno (Bern: Benteli, 1992), 382-385: 382.
- 30 All artists mentioned in this letter are of Zurich origin, except Max Bill who was a citizen of Winterthur. Lohse took the title of “Zurich” concrete artists literally. Letter to D. Gurny, secretary of the municipal president, February 2, 1957. City Archives of Zurich.
- 31 Letter to the president of the city of Zurich, Dr. E. Landolt, January 26, 1957. City Archives of Zurich.
- 32 Internal paper, January 13, 1960. City Archives of Zurich.
- 33 The exhibition opened with the so-called “first work of concrete art,” Kandinsky’s “Première Oeuvre Concrète”, a watercolour of 1910. Max Bill, *Konkrete Kunst: 50 Jahre Entwicklung* (Zürich: Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft, 1960), 9.
- 34 The Latin American artists were Hercules Barsotti, Aluisio Carvão, Lygia Clark, Waldemar Cordeiro, Geraldo de Barros, Amílcar de Castro, Willys de Castro, Hermelindo Fiaminghi, Alfredo Hlito, Enio Iommi, Alfred Julius Jensen, Judith Lauand, Mauricio Nogueiro Lima, Almir Mavignier, Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Pape, Luis Saciloto, Jesus Raphael Soto, Louis Tomasello, Decio Vieira, Mary Vieira, Franz Weissmann, Alexander Wollner.
- 35 Oliver Herwig, *Wortdesign : Eugen Gomringer und die bildende Kunst* (München: Iudicium, 2001), 56-57.
- 36 Bill specified the notion of “concrete art” following the definition by Theo van Doesburg in a text for the exhibition catalog of *Zeitprobleme in der Schweizer Malerei und Plastik*, a pivotal exhibition for Swiss concrete art, held at the Museum of Fine Arts in Zurich in 1936. Bill wrote: “we call those art works concrete art which are rooted in and developed from their deeply innate media and correlation – without outer imitation of phenomena or transformation, thus not from abstraction.” Cit. Margit Weinberg Staber, “Konstruktivismus, konkrete, konstruktive Kunst? Die Schwierigkeit der Begriffe,” in Margit Weinberg Staber, *Kunst-Stoffe: Texte seit 1960* (Bern: Offizin-Verl., 2008), 114-121: 116.
- 37 “(...) because [the works of Pollock] not only show a personal handwriting, but also a structure which is entitled to universality in the sense of concrete art’s efforts (...)” Max Bill, “einleitung zur ausstellung,” [„introduction to the exhibiton], in Max Bill, *Konkrete Kunst: 50 Jahre Entwicklung* (Zürich: Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft, 1960), 8. Also pointed out by Margit Weinberg Staber, “Kommentar,” in Margit Weinberg Staber, *Kunst-Stoffe : Texte seit 1960* (Bern: Offizin-Verl., 2008), 281.
- 38 Max Bill, “einleitung,” *ibid.* See also Margit Weinberg Staber, “Von den 60er in die 70er Jahre” in *Regel und Abweichung : Schweiz konstruktiv ; 1960 bis 1997*, ed. Margit Weinberg Staber, Elisabeth Grossmann, Anne-Marie Bucher (Zürich: Stiftung für Konstruktive und Konkrete Kunst, 1997), 13-54.
- 39 Furthermore, he writes: “Even though it [concrete art] is still alive, what this exhibition clearly demonstrates, voices are not becoming quiet and prophesy its soon end (...)” *Ibid.*, 7. I abstain from an analysis of the press of *konkrete kunst*. Generally speaking the exhibition was welcomed and positively reviewed.
- 40 Lygia Clark showed one painting, *Contre Relief no 7*, 40 x 40 cm.
- 41 e-mail message to the author, September 21, 2009.
- 42 A complete list of the documents was not available to me. Newspaper reviews report that there were “rich literary documents (manifestos, catalogs, letters, etc.)”, “numerous magazines and publications of pioneers” to be seen. H.C., “Konkrete Kunst,” in *Werk-Chronik*, 8, 1960; ap, “Konkrete Kunst,” in *National-Zeitung Basel*, June 27, 1960.
- 43 As an introduction see Harriet Weber-Schäfer, “Abstrakt oder figurative? Das umstrittene Menschenbild in der französischen und deutschen Kunsttheorie nach 1945” and Antje von Graevenitz, “Die ‚Geworfenheit‘ des Menschen. Zur Frage des Existentialismus für deutsche Künstler nach 1945,” both in *Jenseits der Grenzen. Französische und deutsche Kunst vom Ancien Régime bis zur Gegenwart. Thomas W. Gaetgens zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Uwe Fleckner, Martin Schieder and Michael F. Zimmermann (Köln: Akademie Verlag, 2000), 205-227; 228-253. At the same time the exhibition *Salon de Mai Paris 1960* was on view at the Museum of Fine Arts in Zurich, showing works of “L’École de Paris”, mainly of tachistic manner.
- 44 Two out of approx. 15 reviews available to me. “Nearly ninety works are from the 1950s, among them more than fifty stem from the year of 1959! (...) The assembly of the youngest production – with a striking number

of Latin Americans – shows precisely the diversity (probably not the richness) of the processes going on in this field (“in diesem Bereich”) where productive forces are at hand, even if they are different in nature compared to former times (...)” H. C., “Konkrete Kunst, ” in *Werk-Chronik*, 8, 1960; “Developing from Kandisky (...) this art (...) finds a new focus in South America (Brazil, São Paulo) where one can even talk of the appearance of a ‘school’ (...)” Hans Heinz Holz, “Das Duell zwischen Tachismus und konkreter Malerei,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 16, 1960.

45 Embracing nearly the entire time of his professional career as an artist.

46 Bill’s curatorial assistant at that time was Margit Staber, since then a well-known art historian and curator. She claims that the most important aspect of the exhibition, seen from a today’s viewpoint, was the integration of Brazilian artists like Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica and the generation of hard edge and minimal artists of the US. On the other hand the exhibition also included Swiss painters of the younger generation (Jean Baier, Andreas Christen, Karl Gerstner) and “with the integration of Georges Mathieu into a debatably wide radius of concrete art of the 60s Max Bill exhausted the borders of a structural mindset in painting.” Margit Weinberg Staber, “Kommentar,” *ibid.*

47 Max Bill, “architect, architecture and society” (1953), reprinted in *Oscar Niemeyer - eine Legende der Moderne = a legend of modernism*, ed. Andreas Paul (Frankfurt am Main: Deutsches Architekturmuseum; Basel: Birkhäuser 2003), 115-122.

48 Max Bense was professor of philosophy and science theory at the University of Stuttgart since 1949 and run the Studiengalerie of the Studium Generale Technische Hochschule Stuttgart from 1957 - 1981; <http://www.stuttgarter-schule.de/studiengalerie.htm> (10.2009). He became a guest professor at HfG Ulm from 1953 on.

49 Tobias Hoffmann and Frank Schmiedt, “Interview mit Almir Mavignier, Hamburg, Dezember 2002,” at http://www.mavignier.com/hfg_int.htm (10.2009).

50 Gomringer relates that Bill had “since his retrospective in São Paulo, which had evoked enormous interest in him from the side of the South American youth, which approached him from all sides”. Eugen Gomringer, “max bill und die hfg,” in *Max Bill, Maler, Bildhauer, Architekt, Designer*, ed. Thomas Buchsteiner and Marion Ackermann (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2005), 48-49: 49.

51 Eugen Gomringer, “max bill und die hfg,” in *Max Bill, Maler, Bildhauer, Architekt, Designer*, ed. Thomas Buchsteiner and Marion Ackermann (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2005), 48-49: 48.

52 Also by the exhibition *Brazil is building* (“Brasilien baut”), Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen, 1956, with a catalog holding an essay by Siegfried Giedion.

53 At the latest in June 1959, when Bill had his show at Leverkusen from June 19 to July 26, 1959.

54 E-mail message of Elisabeth Walther Bense to the author, August 12, 2009.

55 In 1963 Lygia Clark conceived the pivotal work *Caminhando* which is considered by all experts on her work the most important turning point towards her concept of inner experience. “(...) after 1963, the work could no longer exist anywhere but in the receiver’s experience, outside which the objects are converted into a kind of nullity, resisting any desire of fetishization by their very principle. ” Suely Rolnik, *The Body’s Contagious Memory Lygia Clark’s Return to the Museum*, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0507/rolnik/de> European Institute for progressive cultural politics. (7.2009).

56 Clark accounts that she showed *bichos* and one *Casulo* (reproduced in the catalog), but “não expuseram as fotos das *Arquiteturas Fantásticas*, nem os *Abrigos* nem a *Casa*, tampouco o *Caminhando* – falta de espaço.” On Lygia Clark’s own account of her exhibition at Stuttgart see Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, *Cartas. 1964-1974* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora UFR, 1996), 29-32.

57 *Ibid.*

58 Max Bense, “Lygia Clark’s variable Objekte,” in Max Bense, *Lygia Clark. Brasilien. Variable Objekte*, Stuttgart: Studiengalerie, 1964.

59 In the first instance Alexander Gallery, New York, 1963; Studium Generale, Stuttgart, 1964; Signals, London, 1964 and 1965; Biennial Venice, 1968. *Lygia Clark*, ed. Corinne Diserens et al., (Barcelona: Funació Tàpies, et al., 1998), 351-357.

60 *The New Sculpture: environments and assemblages* of 1967 (Neue Dimensionen der Plastik 1967, engl. 1968), *The New Painting* of 1969 (engl. 1977, dt. Neue Formen des Bildes, and *Art and Life* of 1970 (Leben und Kunst, engl. 1971).

61 Udo Kultermann, *Lygia Clark* (Essen: M.E. Thelen Gallery, 1968).

62 Heiner Stachelhaus, “Spiel-Sachen bei Thelen,” in (*Neue Ruhr Zeitung*, December 10, 1968).

63 In 1983, when the magazine *Flue*, published by the Franklin Furnace Archive, edited a special issue on multiples of Latin American artists Clark’s practice with “relational objects” that she used as a psychotherapeutical medium, was yet described in the introduction as not “strictly art” but as an “experimentation whose ultimate goal is the human being. (...) Eventually she moved away from concerns that were strictly those of ‘art’, into the more ‘scientific’ realm of psychotherapy. To include Lygia Clark’s work in this issue of *Flue* is to propose that the ‘process of art’ is not necessarily contained entirely in art

itself. It is a homage to her and to all creative individuals who dedicate their life and energy to the thoughtful exercise of an experimentation whose ultimate goal is the human being.“ Regina Vater, “Multiples by Latin American Artists,” in *Flue: Volume III 2* (New York: Franklin Furnace Archive, 1983). See also Mignon Nixon, “After Images,” in *October* 83 (Winter, 1998), 114-130.

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The Magic of a Traffic Light: Edgar Negret's *Magic Machines*

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The focus of this paper is the series of sculptures *Magic Machines*, created in New York between 1957 and 1963 by Colombian artist Edgar Negret (b. 1920). These sculptures belong to two contradictory worlds: the mechanical and the magical. The paper examines Negret's experiences in New York and his engagement with American artistic traditions of the 1940s and 1950s in order to understand the apparent contradiction inherent in these works. The paper argues that the mechanical aspect of the *Magic Machines*, evidenced in the use of hard-edged geometric forms and industrial materials, reveals Negret's association with a group of American artists that, in the late 1950s, sought to oppose the highly expressive and gestural approach of the New York School artists. The magical dimension, on the other hand, derives from Negret's interest in Native American art, which had also defined the aesthetic ideals of some of the most prominent Abstract Expressionists. In this respect, Negret's work can be interpreted as a result of his engagement with larger trans-national and trans-historical artistic developments. Ultimately, the paper concludes that Negret's *Magic Machines* reveal the artist's own paradoxical attitude towards New York City and its artistic communities.

The Magic of a Traffic Light: Edgar Negret's *Magic Machines*ⁱ

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*One day I saw a street light in New York that with a simple change of lights could stop, guide, control and lead the aggressive crowds of New York. That a red light made them stop. And that a green light made them move, seemed to me an amazing thing that reminded me of Greek gods... That's how I see the machine... yes, I still see the machines like a primitive man.*ⁱⁱ

Geometric abstraction in Latin America has recently received a great deal of attention. Yet its development in Colombia has not been sufficiently studied.ⁱⁱⁱ The focus of this paper is the work of one of its pioneers in Colombia, Edgar Negret (b.1920). Besides introducing geometric abstraction, Negret brought modern sculpture to Colombia, paving the road for the internationalization of Colombian art. The paper focuses on the series of sculptures *Magic Machines* of 1957, which represent a turning point in Negret's artistic career. It interprets these sculptures in light of the artist's experiences in New York and his close relationships with well-known American artists.

Unlike other Latin American countries, such as Brazil and Argentina, geometric abstraction in Colombia did not develop within the context of local artistic movements. Rather, it was the product of individual artistic investigations resulting from the departure of a handful of artists to Europe and the United States. This situation has encouraged scholars to study the works of these artists as isolated phenomena.^{iv}

This paper is part of a more general attempt to challenge this view. It argues that Negret's approach to geometric abstraction needs to be understood in connection to the American (and European) artistic developments with which he became familiar during the 1950s. More precisely, it is argued that Negret's sculptures are a product of his active

involvement with the artistic community at the time and part of his attempt to incorporate the legacy of the previous generation of New York-based artists.

In this respect, the *Magic Machines* show the dialogue held by Negret with the two generations of artists that dominated the New York art scene in the 1940s and 1950s. On one hand, the mechanical dimension of these works, expressed in the use of geometric abstraction and industrial techniques and materials (aluminum sheets assembled by nuts and bolts), reveals Negret's contact with a group of artists that in the late 1950s rejected the expressive and emotional content of art. On the other hand, the magical dimension through which Negret interprets the machine, derives from his interest in Native American art, and connects him to the aesthetic ideals of the generation of artists working in the 1940s.

The New York Transformation

Negret arrived in New York in 1949 after finishing his artistic training in Colombia.^v The city must have been a great shock for him. He came from Popayán, a Colombian city with 350,000 people that seemed to be trapped in the previous century.^{vi} New York, with a population of almost 8 million (Manhattan alone had around 2 million), constituted an entirely new world.^{vii} To him, the city was the embodiment of a futuristic metropolis: he was dazzled by the skyscrapers, the traffic lights, the billboards, the neon-lights, and the crowds of people on the streets.

Negret's initial years in New York (1949-1951) were marked by a profound artistic transformation. Upon his arrival, he enrolled at The Sculpture Center, an

experimental workshop for sculptors, where he discovered new techniques and materials, in particular, iron-wire and metal sheets. This discovery was especially important for him. At the time, the only available materials for sculptors in Colombia were stone and bronze, and the techniques were limited to carving and casting. At the Center, as the artist recalls, he discovered that “the material itself doesn’t have any special ‘sign’, rather, it is the artist who makes it ‘noble’ or not.”^{viii}

The impact of this discovery can be appreciated in Negret’s explorations during these initial years in New York. *Vase with Flower* of 1949 and *The Nest* of 1950 are good examples of how he started to combine metal sheets and iron-wire in highly abstract compositions. In *Vase with Flower* twisted iron-wire assumes the abstract linear form of a flower in a vase, whereas in *The Nest*, a bird is suggested by a flat sheet of aluminum and the nest by a single iron-wire. Both works stand in contrast with Negret’s sculptures from the early 1940s. Although he had already worked in Popayán with semi-abstract figures, these early sculptures were characteristically heavy and volumetric, much like the sculptures of Henry Moore that he had become acquainted with via reproductions (for instance *The Hand of God* of 1944).

This transformation situated Negret close to what other artists were doing in New York at the time. One remarkable coincidence is with David Smith, who in the late 1940s and early 1950s was also creating sculptures using metal and suggestive linear forms, such as *Royal Bird* of 1948 and *Australia* of 1951. It is not clear whether Negret was acquainted with Smith’s work during this time. The similarity of their artistic practices, however, shows the extent to which Negret’s new approach to sculpture allowed him to fit within New York’s artistic circles. A further confirmation is the success of his first

solo-show in New York at the Peridot Gallery during the spring of 1950, which received favorable reviews in the *New York Times* and *The New York Herald*.^{ix}

Geometry and Machines in Europe

In 1951 Negret embarked on a five-year trip through France and Spain. The trip was significant for him in two respects: first, in Paris he definitively abandoned the figurative mode of his previous works and embraced the language of geometric abstraction; and second, in Mallorca, impressed by the ships on the harbor and the work of artisans in iron, Negret adopted the language of machinery to refer to his sculptures and adopted metal as his preferred material.

Negret lived in Paris between 1951 and 1953. During those years he became close friends with Americans Ellsworth Kelly and Jack Youngerman, and Venezuelans Jesús Rafael Soto and Alejandro Otero. He visited the studios of Constantin Brancusi and Jean Tinguely, who had a profound impact upon his work. And he frequented the circle of abstract artists gathered around the Salon de Réalités Nouvelles, where he exhibited in several opportunities.^x More importantly, Negret had a solo-show at the Galerie Arnaud in 1951, which became an important exhibition space for emerging artists in Paris.

The results of Negret's contact with the Parisian artworld can be seen in the sculptures he executed in Mallorca between 1953 and 1954. *Acoustic Construction I* and *Acoustic Construction II*, both of 1953, consist of welded pieces of industrial material, mainly pipes and sheets of aluminum cut in geometric shapes that resemble some sort of machine. The geometric language of these sculptures shows how important it had been

for Negret to be involved with the abstract artists in Paris. Negret's allusion to the mechanical, on the other hand, parallels the machine aesthetic of Tinguely's pieces.

New York after Pollock

Negret returned to New York in 1956, around the time of Pollock's death. If during his first visit to the city Abstract Expressionism dominated New York's artistic world, at the time of his second visit the artistic scene was increasingly moving toward a critical questioning of the definition and limits of art.^{xi} Further, artists were divided regarding the legacy of the New York School of painters. Thus, as David Joselit explains, "... the legacy of Abstract Expressionism led in at least two ostensibly contradictory directions—toward an increasingly severe formalism, and toward a performative erasure of distinction between aesthetic and social space."^{xii}

The first direction was exemplified by the achievements of abstract artists who dwelled on the impersonal nature of the artistic gesture. The works of artists such as Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, Ad Reinhardt and Frank Stella characterized the new approach to abstraction. The second direction was epitomized by Allan Kaprow's idea that the primary source of artistic inspiration was the city itself, and the incorporation of everyday objects into aesthetic space. For Kaprow, the artist had to "become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life, either our bodies, clothes, rooms, or, if need be, the vastness of Forty-Second Street."^{xiii}

Back in New York Negret found himself immersed in this complex artworld. In fact, his *Magic Machines* have important connections with both kinds of reactions to

Abstract Expressionism. They embody the new approach to abstraction and, at the same time, they were inspired in the mechanical world of New York.

Upon his arrival Negret again contacted Kelly and Youngerman, who had returned to the city in 1954 and 1956, respectively. The artists had set up their studios in Coenties Slip and were joined, soon after, by Robert Indiana and Agnes Martin. This informal artistic group shared the rejection of the subjective and gestural qualities of Abstract Expressionism and favored a “cool,” depersonalized approach to art.^{xiv} Their approach was manifested in the use of hard-edged geometric shapes and a restricted color palette. Kelly’s *Tripicot* of 1957, Youngerman’s *Black Blue* of 1961, and Indiana’s *Melville* of 1961 are good examples of this.^{xv} Negret’s *Magic Machines* share much with this kind of reaction to Abstract Expressionism. His medium is certainly different from the one used by the artists of Coenties Slip –he was a sculptor and they were mainly painters. Yet his work is close to theirs in various respects.

Negret used mostly geometric shapes and primary colors in the construction of his pieces. *Magic Machine No. 14*, for example, consists of a vertical pedestal painted in dark blue and a complex structure of geometric planes in the same color, in addition to gray and a lighter blue piece and circular forms in red, which are projected horizontally at the top of the sculpture. *Magic Machine and Equinox* is a wall-relief and in general is less rigidly structured than the free-standing version. In it, however, Negret used the same abstract geometric language and a restricted color palette.

The cold and impersonal approach to abstraction is also present in the *Magic Machines*. This can be seen in Negret’s adoption of industrial materials and techniques and the lusterless quality of the pigments he used. For the *Magic Machines* Negret used

aluminum sheets that were cut and folded in geometric shapes. The pieces were assembled through clearly visible nuts and bolts, and were painted with matte colors. Like the artists of Coenties Slip, Negret used these elements to negate the gestural, “hot” approach to artistic composition.

A final evidence of the connection between Negret and these artists comes from Kelly’s own experiments in sculpture. In 1959, just a couple years after Negret initiated his aluminum works, Kelly created *Pony* and *Gate* using the same technique and materials as Negret had used in his machines. Although Kelly and Negret’s sculptures differ greatly in their inspiration and aims, it is evident that they share common grounds.^{xvi}

The *Magic Machines*, on the other hand, also incorporate the reaction to Abstract Expressionism epitomized by Kaprow’s idea that the artist should allow himself to be “dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life and ... the vastness of Forty-Second Street.”^{xvii} For Negret, the *Magic Machines* expressed his fascination with New York City and its mechanical world: with its lights, the subway system, the traffic, the ships.^{xviii} Indeed, as he describes it, the inspiration for the machines was the city itself: “the series of *Magic Machines* that I executed there [in New York] for 10 years [sic] ... had a lot to do with that mechanical world of New York.”^{xix}

The impact that this mechanical world had on Negret’s work was not restricted to the way he chose to describe his sculptures, namely, as machines. The sculptures themselves also incorporate the references to mechanical devices. The assemblage of pieces in *Magic Machine* and *Magic Machine (Wall-relief)*, for instance, bring to mind mechanical forms such as the hidden mechanisms of a clock; whereas in *Magic Machine*

No. 14 the vertical pedestal juxtaposed to the horizontal structure on top recalls street-signs, like the ones that signal the names of streets and avenues.

One significant aspect of Negret's engagement with the technological world of New York is his experiences in the harbor. The ships in Mallorca had already inspired him to adopt the machine aesthetic for his sculptures of the mid-1950s. In New York he also frequently visited the harbor, and it became a source for his *Magic Machines*. In particular, the use of matte pigments to paint the aluminum sheets of his pieces derives from Negret's experience in the harbor. As he recalls,

When I was in New York I frequently visited the harbor. I was fascinated by the harbor with all those ships and their wonderful lines that are also expressive... and I always saw that they painted them: first in red, then white, then black.... The sailors always, always fighting against the oxidation of metal... then it became natural for me to see the metal like that, painted, covered.^{xx}

The Encounter with Native American Art

The mechanical aspect of the *Magic Machines* incorporates the two directions in which the artistic world in New York moved after the boom of Abstract Expressionism: the "cool" and the inclusion of the city itself into aesthetic space. Yet, next to this technological aspect, there is another equally important element in Negret's sculptures: the magical. This aspect places them within the context of "primitive" art forms. It connects Negret's artistic interests with those of the previous generation of artists in New York who, like him, were fascinated with Native American art.

Negret's interest in "primitive" art can be traced back to the influence of two of his most important mentors: the Spanish sculptor Jorge Oteiza and the American sculptor

Louise Nevelson. Negret met Oteiza in Popayán in the 1940s, where he studied the ritual objects and artifacts in the archeological site of San Agustín. In fact, throughout his career Oteiza expressed an interest in pre-Columbian art, particularly, the notions of spirituality expressed in it. For him, the artist's mission was to “rehabilitate the ‘religious’ and ultimately ethical function of the work of art,”^{xxi} which for him was the most important characteristic of “primitive” art.

Negret, on the other hand, met Nevelson at The Sculpture Center during his first visit to New York. She had started teaching there in the mid 1940s, after returning from a trip to Mexico, where she studied the ancient art and architecture of Mayan and Aztec cultures. The friendship between her and Negret was, very likely, formed during those days. Thus, when Negret arrived in New York for a second time, he set up set his studio on a warehouse in midtown Manhattan close to Nevelson's home, where she displayed her collection of Native North American and pre-Columbian art.

Negret's interest in “primitive” art consolidated throughout the 1950s. In Paris he frequently visited the Musée de l'homme and its collection of pre-Columbian arts. In New York he had access to the large collections of Native American art housed in the Museum of the American Indian and the American Museum of Natural History. Importantly, shortly after his second arrival in New York, Negret received a UNESCO scholarship to travel west to study Native American art.

There is very little information about this trip. Most scholars suggest that Negret was interested specifically in the sand-paintings of the Navajos, and the cliff-dwellings of the Pueblos.^{xxii} Negret's closest family report that he visited the Mesa Verde Park, and the artist himself recalls his witnessing of a Navajo healing ceremony. The works

executed by Negret after his return from this trip, however, are evidence of his contact with specific elements of the Pueblo culture, in particular the Hopi, rather than with the Navajos. His *Masks*, his *Cliff-dwellings* but, especially, his *Kachinas* are good examples of how influential the art of the Pueblo was for his future work.^{xxiii}

The Magic of a Traffic Light

Negret's decision to study Native North American art, instead of pre-Columbian cultures of South America, may seem surprising. Other Latin American artists, starting with Joaquín Torres-García and including his fellow countryman Eduardo Ramírez-Villamizar, had made efforts to incorporate into geometric abstraction the art of pre-Columbian cultures, which were somehow thought by them to be closer to their own background. Negret's choice, however, was clearly not guided by nationalistic considerations.^{xxiv} It was, rather, motivated by his engagement with the New York's artistic community that surrounded him. The fascination with Native American art had defined the aesthetic ideals of the generation of artists working in New York in the 1940s, and Negret was acutely aware of this.

During the 1940s, Abstract Expressionists and the Indian Space Painters sought sources for their art in both modern and ancient art forms.^{xxv} They were interested in European modernisms and, to this extent, they adapted the strategies and visual languages of movements such as Cubism and Surrealism. At the same time, they aspired to create an art that was essentially American. Key to this latter endeavor was the incorporation of art of Native American people, specifically Northwest Coast Indian art. As Michael Leja

argues, the “evocation of Native American art became an effective and widely used means of binding artistic projects derived from European traditions to the American ‘soil’ and ‘spirit’, thereby differentiating them from European work.”^{xxvi}

Negret was obviously not moved by these nationalistic considerations. There was, however, another aspect of Native American Art that greatly appealed to him: its spiritual content. This second aspect had already attracted Abstract Expressionists, whose work was very likely known by Negret. Jackson Pollock and David Smith, for instance, were driven to study Native American art because of their interest in the unconscious and its power to reveal the hidden aspects of human nature. Whereas the Mythmakers (Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb, Clyfford Still, and Barnett Newman) saw in the terror and tragedy of the myths referenced in Northwest Coast Indian art the fears and threats faced by modern men.^{xxvii}

Like these artists, Negret thought it was necessary to re-establish a special kinship between the “primitive” and the “modern” man. The magical dimension of the *Magic Machines* was meant to accomplish this. For Negret, who came from the Popayán of the 1940s, the machine was not the product of a rational mind, but rather a miracle that modern men did not recognize as such. As he explained, “I still see the machines like a primitive man ... I still see the world with primitive eyes, I’m not interested in technology as a functional thing, I see it like that, like a ‘miracle’.”^{xxviii} Negret’s amazement at the simple effect of a traffic light on New York’s aggressive crowd reveals the peculiarity of this approach: he did not see the machine in its simple mechanical function, but rather as a magical object, a modern *miracle* of science and technology.

The *Magic Machines* are thus comparable to “primitive” ritual artifacts. Negret conceived these machines as devices that, like ritualistic and religious objects, would serve to understand and control the world, in this case the technological world. Not surprisingly, he thought that his mission as an artist was to “to clarify [and] make intelligible the complex and seemingly chaotic world in which we live.”^{xxxix}

When the *Magic Machines* were exhibited in 1959 at the David Herbert Gallery in New York, many understood that they were meant to be seen as ritualistic devices. Art critic Franklin Konigsberg, for example, described them as “man’s means to escape this world and penetrate the mysteries beyond. [Negret’s] clear, vivid, polychrome wood and aluminum constructions are a modern realization of creation’s secret harmonies.”^{xxx} Similarly, critic Lawrence Campbell, writing in *Art News* in November of 1959, saw Negret’s work as “a kind of Neolithic art expressing the spirit of the machines age.”^{xxxi}

Conclusions

Negret’s *Magic Machines* belong to two contradictory worlds: the mechanical and the magical. The mechanical world is embodied in the materials and techniques used in the fabrication of the sculptures as well as in Negret’s use of a rational, geometric language proper of modernity. In this respect, he aligned himself with a cluster of artists, such as Ellsworth Kelly, Jack Youngerman, and Robert Indiana, who opposed the highly expressive, subjective and almost irrational nature of the art characteristic of Abstract Expressionism.

The magical world, on the other hand, is expressed in Negret's attempt to transform the machines into apparatuses for the expression of the spiritual. Such a transformation resulted from his engagement with sculptors Jorge Oteiza and Louise Nevelson, with whom he shared an interest in "primitive" art forms. More importantly, it resulted from his investigation of the native cultures of the west of the United States, in particular, the Pueblo. In this respect, Negret was closer to the aesthetic ideals of some of the most prominent Abstract Expressionists, who had also referenced Native North American art in their own work of the early 1940s.

The *Magic Machines*, thus, illustrate how despite the absence of major artistic movements in Colombia in the 1950s, Negret's work was not an isolated phenomenon. It was, instead, engaged with larger trans-national and trans-historical artistic developments. Ultimately, however, the *Magic Machines* reveal Negret's somehow paradoxical attitude towards the industrialized world and the art of New York. In the first place, Negret embraced that world, yet he still described himself as a "primitive," looking at the machine as a miracle, rather than a product of a rational intellect. Secondly, while other artists in New York were questioning the definition and the boundaries of art through the language of geometric abstraction and industrial materials, Negret used that same language and materials in his *Magic Machines* to advocate for a return to a primordial meaning of art: the artwork as a ritualistic, magical object that connects men with the hidden forces of nature.

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ⁱ This paper is part of my PhD dissertation titled *The Rise of Modernism in Colombia: Internationalism and Abstraction in the Work of Edgar Negret and Eduardo Ramírez-Villamizar*. The dissertation attempts to make a historical reconstruction of the career of Edgar Negret (b. 1920) and Eduardo Ramírez-Villamizar (1923—2004), starting with their sojourns to Europe and America in the 1950s throughout the 1970s in Colombia. The purpose is to interpret the birth of Colombian abstract geometric sculpture in relation to the artistic production in Paris and New York, with an eye towards understanding the subsequent development of modern art in Colombia.

ⁱⁱ Edgar Negret. “Interview,” in Fausto Panesso, *Botero, Grau, Negret, Obregón, Ramírez: los intocables*. Bogotá: Ediciones Alcaravan, 1975, 69. All translations from this text are mine.

ⁱⁱⁱ Several exhibitions have presented large samples of the development of geometric abstraction in Uruguay, Venezuela, Brazil, and Argentina, but none of them have included Negret or any other Colombian artist. Some of these exhibitions include: *Geometric Abstraction: Latin American Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection* (Fogg Art Museum of the Harvard University Art Museums, 2001); *Inverted Utopias: Avant-garde Art in Latin America* (The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2004); *The Sites of Latin American Abstraction* (Cisneros-Fontanals Foundation, Miami, 2006-7); *The Geometry of Hope: Latin American Abstract Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection* (Blanton Museum of Art, University of Austin, Texas; Grey Art Gallery, New York University, 2007), and *New Perspectives in Latin American Art, 1930–2006: Selections from a Decade of Acquisitions* (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2007-2008).

^{iv} This is the case of Galaor Carbonell’s *Negret. Las etapas creativas* and José María Salvador’s *De la máquina al mito*, the most comprehensive studies of Negret’s work, which provide a detailed formal account of his sculptures, but fail to situate them within the broader contexts of New York and Paris.

^v Negret studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cali, Colombia, between 1938 and 1944. In the mid-1940s he met the Spanish sculptor Jorge Oteiza in Popayán, who introduced him to modern sculpture and aesthetic ideas through reproductions of Henry Moore and Julio González’s work. By the late 1940s, Negret worked mainly in plaster and created semi-abstract figures reminiscent of Moore’s sculptures.

^{vi} Dane statistics. http://www.dane.gov.co/files/censo2005/resultados_regiones.pdf Retrieved on 4/12/08

^{vii} Demographics of New York City, Wikipedia.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_New_York_City#Historic_population_figures Retrieved on 4/12/08

^{viii} Negret, “Interview,” in Panesso, *Los intocables*, 65.

^{ix} Stuart Preston, “Diversity Modern. An Italian Contemporary and Americans,” in *The New York Times*, May 21, 1950; and Carlyle Burrows, “Art and Artists. Groups Downtown,” in *New York Herald Tribune*, June 4, 1950.

^x Negret participated in the fifth and seventh Salon des Réalités Nouvelles in 1951 and 1952.

^{xi} Thomas Crow has characterized this position as follows: “every serious artistic initiative became [in the late 1950s and early 1960s] a charged proposition about the nature and limits of art itself.” Thomas Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004. 11.

^{xii} David Joselit, “Expanded Gestures: Painting of the 1950s,” in *American Art Since 1945*, London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003. 34.

^{xiii} Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” quoted in Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties*, 33. Kaprow’s own *Happenings* and Robert Rauschenberg’s *Combines* are good examples of the different ways in which artists attempted to incorporate the city and the everyday object into aesthetic space.

^{xiv} See Mildred Glimcher, “Coenties Slip,” *Indiana, Kelly, Martin, Rosenquist, Youngerman at Coenties Slip*; and John Stringer, “Introduction” in *25 años despues: Robert Indiana, Ellsworth Kelly, Agnes Martin, Edgar Negret, Louise Nevelson, Jack Youngerman*. Youngerman explains that “Down there [in Coenties Slip], one of the things we were very conscious of, without talking that much about it was the fact that we all knew that we weren’t part of the de Kooning/Pollock legacy in art which was centered around Tenth Street.” Quoted in Glimcher, “Coenties Slip,” in *Indiana, Kelly, Martin, Rosenquist, Youngerman at Coenties Slip*. New York: Pace Gallery, 1993, 8.

^{xv} Indiana’s approach differs from Kelly and Youngerman’s in his use of lettering taken from advertisement and street-signs, which brings him closer to the Pop generation of the 1960s. However, he shares with the Coenties Slip artists the use of clear-cut geometric shapes and a restricted color composition. He

acknowledges these affinities when he claims that “Kelly simply made me aware of the use of primary colors and hard edges.” Quoted in Glimcher, “Coenties Slip,” 10.

^{xvi} It is important to note here that Negret and Kelly were not the only ones using painted aluminum sheet in the construction of their sculptures. In fact, Alexander Calder had been using this material since the late 1930s, and he was certainly an important source of inspiration for both artists. Kelly met Calder in Paris in 1953, and it is likely that Negret also met him at that time. Both artists had acknowledged the significance of Calder’s work for their own practice.

^{xvii} Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” in Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties*, 33.

^{xviii} In this respect, Negret’s attitude toward New York is also close to Indiana’s, who used the language of ships, trucks, railroads and billboards as sources for his paintings. Indiana claims, “... every ship that passed on the river, every tug, every barge, every railroad car on every flatboat, every truck passed below on the ship ... carried these marks and legends that set the style of my painting.” Quoted in Glimcher, “Coenties Slip,” 10.

^{xix} Negret, “Interview,” in Panesso, *Los intocables*, 69.

^{xx} *Ibid.* 69.

^{xxi} Magrit Rowell, “A Timeless Modernism,” in *Oteiza: propósito experimental = an experimental proposition*. Madrid: Fundación Caja de Pensiones, 1998, 16.

^{xxii} See Galaor Carbonell, *Negret. Las estapas creativas*; Fausto Panesso, *Los intocables*; and Carlos Castillo, “Notas para el análisis sociológico de la obra de Edgar Negret.”

^{xxiii} In my dissertation I explore in detail the connection between Negret’s *Kachinas* and *Masks*, and the ritual artifacts and ceremonies of the Pueblo culture, in particular the Kachina cult. There are important formal similarities between Negret’s works and Pueblo art forms, but the most significant aspect for him was the Pueblo belief that ritualistic objects perform a spiritual union between men and gods. This aspect permeates Negret’s work of the late 1950s and early 1960s, including his *Magic Machines*.

^{xxiv} It is important to note here that Ramírez-Villamizar’s interest in South American pre-Columbian art, like Negret’s fascination with Native North American art, did not arise either from nationalistic considerations. Ramírez-Villamizar, however, was acutely aware that his use of pre-Columbian art had strong links with a specific Colombian past. I discuss this issue in more detail in my dissertation.

^{xxv} The Indian Space Painters group flourished in New York at about the same time as Abstract Expressionism in the early 1940s. The group included artists Robert Barrel, Peter Busa and Steve Wheeler, whose goal was to surpass Picasso’s Cubism by developing a new pictorial space inspired by Native art from both Americas. They shared with Abstract Expressionism the interest in Native American art and the desire to create abstract, all-over compositions. The notoriety of the latter group, however, has overshadowed the achievements of the Indian Space Painters. See Sandra Kraskin, *Indian Space Painters*; and Ann Gibson, “Painting Outside the Paradigm: Indian Space.”

^{xxvi} Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993, 87.

^{xxvii} See, Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism*; and Jackson Rushing, *Native American Art and the New York Avant-garde: A History of Cultural Primitivism*.

^{xxviii} Negret, “Interview,” in Panesso, *Los Intocables*, 69-74.

^{xxix} *Ibid.* 69

^{xxx} Franklin Konigsberg, “Presentation,” *Edgar Negret*, Exh. Cat. David Herbert Gallery, Fall 1959.

^{xxxi} Lawrence Campbell, “Reviews and Previews. Edgar Negret,” *Art News*, vol. 58, no. 7, November, 1959, 14-15.

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The Trauma of Dislocation and the Development of Abstraction: Renegotiations of Space, Experience, and Identity in the Work of Gertrude Goldschmidt and Mira Schendel

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The focus of my paper is the work of Gertrude Goldschmidt, commonly known as Gego, and Mira Schendel. The basis of the following comparison arose primarily from the visual and sensorial qualities present in the women's work. Both artists, exposed to the contemporary abstraction being produced in Brazil and Venezuela, created a body of work distinct from that of their artistic peers. In an era dominated by rigid, objective, political abstraction, their work was expressive, irregular, pliant, and subjective.² In the process of trying to determine the basis of their aberrant abstraction, the artists' multiple points of contact with contemporaneous Latin American art, European philosophy, and historical artistic movements illuminated the international context from which they emerged. The central thesis of this study contends that for Gego and Schendel the process of creation and the production of art was a means by which they meditated and attempted to grapple with the wounds of their past. Additionally, the trauma expressed in their work created manifest differences from their artistic peers.

The Trauma of Dislocation and the Development of Abstraction: Renegotiations of Space, Experience, and Identity in the Work of Gertrude Goldschmidt and Mira Schendel

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The focus of my paper is the work of Gertrude Goldschmidt, commonly known as Gego, and Mira Schendel. The basis of the following comparison arose primarily from the visual and sensorial qualities present in the women's work. Both artists, exposed to the contemporary abstraction being produced in Brazil and Venezuela, created a body of work distinct from that of their artistic peers. In an era dominated by rigid, objective, political abstraction, their work was expressive, irregular, pliant, and subjective.² In the process of trying to determine the basis of their aberrant abstraction, the artists' multiple points of contact with contemporaneous Latin American art, European philosophy, and historical artistic movements illuminated the international context from which they emerged. The central thesis of this study contends that for Gego and Schendel the process of creation and the production of art was a means by which they meditated and attempted to grapple with the wounds of their past. Additionally, the trauma expressed in their work created manifest differences from their artistic peers.

A comparison of the artists raises many questions: Why did these women share so many points of interest and why did they feel the need to invite their audiences to confront the same questions? Why were they concerned with conveying or creating an individualized experience? How did the experience they created reflect their own lived experience? What prompted their constant inquiry and negotiation of opposition? Why

did their work develop along such similar lines despite barriers of time, distance, and geography? What inspired them to create works of art? Why did they choose abstraction? Why did they choose a form of abstraction which abandoned the primacy of strictly geometric forms and embraced flexibility and chance?

The maturation of the artistic style of the women which coincided with the social unrest in their respective countries of residence reinforces this argument. Gego began to produce works of art in earnest after 1952, upon leaving Caracas for the relative tranquility of the coast. It was not until the end of the Jiménez dictatorship and the decade that followed the fall of the dictatorial government that Gego produced works which directly addressed her feelings and history. Schendel's reaction to dictatorship in Brazil was more immediate, arising concurrently with the dictatorship, heralded by a period of compulsive production which began in 1964 with the *Monotopias* series. Paulo Herkenhoff suggests that during the dictatorship Schendel experienced "profound metaphysical anxieties."³ In essence, my contention is that the repercussions of the trials and tragedies of their histories were omnipresent in all of their subsequent activities but emerged with force upon the reawakening of their earlier traumatic experiences in Europe and their subsequent exile. The inability to speak and the desire to forget the traumatic experiences of their past likely inspired their innovative brands of abstraction which allowed the artists to recreate their experience without having to turn to language, narrative, or figuration. In all likelihood, the need to come to grips with the emotional and psychic trauma the artists experienced as young adults, of which both artists would not or could not speak, found expression in artworks which reflected the anxiety, uncertainty, and difficulty of those earlier events.

An assessment of the iconic pieces for which each artist is primarily known, the *Reticulárea* and the *Droguinha* respectively, elucidates the significant connections between the artists' work. With the *Reticulárea*, Gego creates an alien environment in which the viewer confronts a series of contrasts; movement and stasis, organic and inorganic, strength and vulnerability. The *Reticulárea* denies space its neutrality and in the process dissolves the distance between the work of art and the experience of the work of art. It also necessitates a constant adaptation and renegotiation of the understanding of one's relationship to the sculpture. Once installed in an exhibition space, the *Reticulárea* remains in a state of constant flux. The artwork constantly challenges perception through its ability to create infinite possibilities and variation. The *Reticuláreas* transform not just the room but the material used to construct them; the mechanical and rigid transforms into something airy and mobile. Despite the spare, simple nature of the materials, the result is an artwork which is reactive and changeable. The structure's openness, built of industrial materials, is vulnerable to the environment. Changes in the atmosphere, currents of air, and movement within the space transform the sculpture. Each shift is unique and unpredictable. The *Reticulárea* is more than an object, it is a presence which constantly changes itself and through its own metamorphoses redefines the space and the viewer's relationship to the piece. It is not merely an object but a living organism built of inanimate materials.

The principle characteristics of Schendel's *Droguinhas* (*Little Nothings*) are malleability and reactivity. She constructed the *Droguinhas* using extremely thin, nearly transparent pieces of rice paper which she rolled and knotted with her hands to create net-like form. The finished objects, which hang from the ceiling, do not resemble the original

material. Rather, she transformed the extremely fragile sheets through gesture. The *Droguinhas* capture the temporal element of the process and active gesture of the artist. The transformation of materials is intrinsic to the work of both Gego and Schendel. Unlike the *Reticulárea*, the *Droguinhas* retain the appearance of a hand-made object which captures the lived experience of the work's creations. Schendel transformed a fragile, transparent material into opaque strands to build an object with mass and volume. Though the knotted rice paper took on the form of rope that constructs a net, the material retains its inherent fragility and vulnerability. The shape of the sculpture, which evokes the idea of rope or nets, reinforced conflicting perceptions of strength and security with capture and restraint. Like the *Reticulárea*, the *Droguinhas* have no discernable front or back. They lack solidity of any kind. They are transparent and solid, affixed and mobile, heavy and weightless.

The sculptural works of Schendel and Gego effectively created a moment of sublime contact. In *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, Saul Friedlander discusses the Holocaust as an event which was significant and unique in that the outer limits of human barbarity were reached and then radically transgressed. Friedlander discusses the Holocaust as a sublime event for Nazi perpetrators however; his description of sublimity accurately describes the impact of the work of the artists.⁴ To summarize, Friedlander describes the three distinctive steps which replicate the sublime encounter.⁵ The first step is the creation of a radical rupture or break. In Gego's and Schendel's work, this transgression is embodied by the viewer's entrance into the space and confrontation with the object. Second is a flooding of the system with emotion. The artists achieve sensory saturation through a number of different means. Finally, the

perpetrator or survivor of the exchange experiences elation at the ability to survive or escape the encounter. The audience emerges from contact with the artists' work changed or aware of a new type of experience. In this way, Schendel and Gego are able to simulate the emotions of the terrorized.

Gego's and Schendel's journeys carried them across continents, away from war, their families, and mortal danger. The women were among the immigrants who arrived in Latin America seeking refuge from World War II or leaving Europe in the wake of that conflict. The *Droguinhas* and *Reticuláreas*, among other works which express that experience, share the following characteristics; the simultaneous presence of rigidity and malleability, sculpture that is reactive to the presence and movement of the viewer, activation and use of ambient space. Beyond these similarities, there are others, among them an interest in the notion of the existential concept of the void and an indictment of language, which further connect Gego's and Schendel's work.⁶ The emotionality and expressivity of the works were designed to incite inquiries into issues of identity, self, and experience.⁷

Their works are distinct products of a transnational journey. Gego was born into a world of privilege. The Goldschmidt family owned and operated a large and successful commercial bank, founded by her grandfather, in Hamburg, Germany. She was raised in Weimar Germany whose culture during the inter-war period was remarkably productive. Gego's Germany was at the center of much of the artistic revolution.⁸ In 1932, Goldschmidt enrolled at the Technische Hochschule of Stuttgart from which she received a degree in both architecture and engineering in 1938.⁹ While in school, Gego worked at

a variety of architectural firms and participated in student art exhibitions.¹⁰ Architecture in Weimar Germany was dominated by the Bauhaus, considered by some scholars to be the most influential school of modernist art and design in the Twentieth Century.¹¹ The Bauhaus was an offshoot of the Arts and Crafts Movement; like its predecessors, Bauhaus artists, led by Walter Gropius, sought to bring about a revolution in modern art and architecture by reuniting creative and industrial arts. Though Gego did not attend the Bauhaus, she was aware of its cultural presence. During her tenure at the Technische Hochschule of Stuttgart, the formerly conservative faculty of the School of Architecture began to turn toward the Bauhaus' interdisciplinary principles.¹² Gego discussed the importance of the Bauhaus in an interview in 1964 when she noted that craftsmanship, the basis of Bauhaus ideology, was the basis of all creative force.¹³

Schendel spent the majority of her young life in Italy, though she was born in Switzerland and subsequently moved, first to Germany and then to Milan. She too enjoyed a childhood defined by privilege. Her mother, who married an Italian count, sent Schendel to a Catholic school in the countryside surrounding the city. Though raised a Catholic, Schendel was aware of her Jewish heritage, often visiting her father's Jewish family in Germany during school holidays. Between 1930 and 1936, she attended art courses at the Via Fontanesi in Milan which likely offered preparatory courses for enrollment at the School of Fine Arts. However, in 1936, she enrolled as a student in philosophy at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart. Philosophy, both western and eastern, deeply influenced Schendel's later artistic production.

The connection between Gego's and Schendel's sculptural environments becomes even more distinct when compared to the works of other Latin American artists who were also interested in challenging perception through the construction of alternative environments. Both Schendel and Gego have been compared with their contemporaries in Brazil, Helio Oiticica and Lygia Pape.¹⁴ Oiticica and Pape also emphasized the participation and experience in their works. Like Schendel and Gego, Oiticica opened the geometric form and invited the viewer to explore the exhibition space. However, Oiticica retained the rigidity of form associated with the Arte Concreto movement and emphasized the experience of color limiting the degree of encounter between subject and object. Pape and Oiticica invited their audiences to pick up and manipulate objects. Both artists depended upon the involvement of the viewer to complete the work. In contrast, Schendel's and Gego's work did not rely on the viewer to complete the experience, rather the experience of the object was individuated and beyond the control of the viewer. The interaction between the participants and the object was forced and, therefore, involved a different kind of uncertainty in which the viewer could affect the object but could not control the object's affect on them.

The embrace of the expressive potential of form associated with Gego and her contemporaries in Brazil separated her from the kinetic artists working in Venezuela.¹⁵ Venezuelan kineticism emerged as Venezuela became a modern, industrialized nation. The artists who dominated the movement, Jesus Rafael Soto, Alejandro Otero, and Carlos Cruz-Diez were enthusiastic proponents of Venezuelan modernization, having returned from exile in Paris in the 1940s intent on securing the place of Venezuelan art on the world stage. The triumvirate of Kineticists made themselves highly visible within

Venezuela and international society.¹⁶ It was not that Gego's work differed so dramatically from that of her peers, but Gego never sought the spotlight. Her project was never to express the condition of modern Latin America but to recreate something much more intimate and personally meaningful.

Both Gego and Schendel were marked by their heritage. Though it was not outwardly visible, they were eventually forced to wear manifestations or signifiers of their religion. Both women were labeled, marked, and identified as outsiders. The visibility of the sign then determined their fate. For Schendel this experience was more pronounced because, despite the fact that she was not raised a Jew, she was unable to escape the mark of her ancestry. Schendel's process in producing the line in the *Monotopias* and the *Bombas*, by which she allowed the line to emerge from the page, indicates the power of sign. The inability to control the impact of the mark on the paper may stem from her experience of the inescapability of the sign. For Schendel, the invisible "smear" of her history was made visible by a violent, totalitarian government which showed no regard for the fact that she was a practicing, devout Catholic woman. In essence, Nazism and Facism forced a new identity upon her, one which carried with it mortal danger.

Both Schendel and Gego attested to the fact that art was an outline for their emotions. For Schendel, this is reflected in statements regarding the necessity of producing art upon her arrival in Brazil, which attest to the use of art as manifestation of the real in her work.¹⁷ In response to a question regarding the decisive moment of creation, Gego cited "the urgency to project theoretical ideas and three-dimensional

vision from former experience and drawings,” as motivational.¹⁸ Elsewhere she noted that she did not anticipate the outcome of her work but knew it originated from her hands, eyes, and emotions.¹⁹ Given the emotional basis of the artistic process of both artists, it is likely they expressed both their unconscious and conscious thoughts in their work.

Gego’s and Schendel’s innovative abstraction reflects the impotence of language to explain lived experience and reinforces the link between their work and the traumatic events of their past. The philosophical writings of Jacques Lacan are useful in understanding the artists’ turn towards abstraction. He argued that the traumatic experience was unsymbolizable and could not be explained or transformed through language because the “real” experience of an event cannot be mediated through language if it cannot be fully comprehended.²⁰ Lacan argued that the “real” existed beyond the realm of appearances and images and was suppressed by the victim of trauma, emerging from the unconscious as a need.²¹ The repetitive desire to express similar experiences may reflect, as Lacan theorizes, a compulsive need for the “real” to express itself in victims dealing with traumatic events. The consistency of the artists’ engagement with the issues of transitivity, dislocation, and trauma indicate the motivation behind their inquiries, representing a persistent need to renegotiate their own understanding of those concepts.

Regardless of the precise confluence of events which resulted in their similar production, the artists created spaces in which the viewer was forced to confront the unknown after which they, ideally, were changed. The experience of every viewer hinged on the same factors creating a universal experience. Schendel and Gego did not just raise

individual consciousness but collective, historical consciousness by confronting the viewer with a transformative experience which reflected their own. The dualities which figured so prominently in the artistic work were attempts to deal with issues of identity. Specifically, the difficulty the women experienced in attempting to develop coherent identities was a complicated process that involved the negotiation of opposite poles; European and American, Jewish and Catholic, immigrant and natives.

Endnotes

- 1 The following paper is redacted from my MA thesis of the same title.
- 2 Enriquez, Mary Schneider, "Mapping Change: A Historical Perspective on Geometric Abstraction in Argentina, Venezuela, and Brazil," In *Geometric Abstraction: Latin American Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection*, ed. by Juan Luis Delmont et. al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 13-38.
- 3 Paulo Herkenhoff, "Autonomous Doodles, Verbal Scrawls and Erasures: On Drawing in South America," in *Realigning Vision: Alternative Currents in South American Drawing* (Austin, 1997).
- 4 Saul Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* (Bloomington, 1993), 82-83.
- 5 Ibid, 105-110. Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (Ithaca, 1998), 35.
- 6 For further discussion of these topics please see my M.A. Thesis of the same title.
- 7 Enriquez, Mary Schneider, "Mapping Change: A Historical Perspective on Geometric Abstraction in Argentina, Venezuela, and Brazil," In *Geometric Abstraction: Latin American Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection* (New Haven, 2001), 13-38.
- 8 Peter Demetz, "Introduction: A Map of Courage," in *Foto: Modernity in Central Europe, 1918-1945* (New York; London, 2007), 1.
- 9 Gego, "Testimony 13," in *Sabiduras: y Otros Textos de Gego* (Houston, 2005), 234.
- 10 Josefina Manriquez, "Line on Paper and Without Paper. Chronology," in *Gego, Between Transparency and the Invisible* (Houston, 2006), 203.
- 11 Hal Foster, et. al., "1923," in *Art Since 1900* (New York, 2004).
- 12 Guy Brett, "Gego: Art, Design and the Poetic Field," in *Gego: Defying Structures* (Barcelona, 2006).
- 13 Gego, "Testimony 2" in *Sabiduras: y Otros Textos de Gego* (Houston, 2005), 158.
- 14 Guy Brett, "Gego: Art, Design and the Poetic Field," in *Gego: Defying Structures* (Barcelona, 2006), 41. Harper Montgomery, "Gego, Helio Oiticica and Lygia Pape," in *Latin American and Caribbean Art Moma at El Museo* (New York, 2004), 115.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Guy Brett, "Gego: Art, Design and the Poetic Field," in *Defying Structures* (Barcelona, 2006), 37.
- 17 Galerie National Du Jeu de Paume, *Mira Schendel*, exh. cat., Paris (Paris, 2001).
- 18 Gego, "Testimony 5," in *Sabiduras: y Otros Textos de Gego* (Houston, 2005), 176.
- 19 Gego, "Testimony 7," in *Sabiduras: y otros textos de Gego* (Houston, 2005), 188.
- 20 Jacques Lacan (1973), *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1981).
- 21 Ibid.

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Intervenciones sudamericanas sobre el paradigma de la arquitectura moderna: el viaje de Max Bill a Brasil.*

South American Readings and Interventions on Modern Architectural Model. The Trip of Max Bill to Brazil.

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El artista suizo Max Bill realizó un viaje al Brasil en mayo de 1953 invitado por el Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores brasileño, el Itamaraty. Niomar Moniz Sodré, directora del Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM-RJ) fue la artífice de esta visita. Casada con Paulo Bittencourt, dueño del diario carioca *Correio da Manhã*, ambos personajes resultaron clave en la operación conjunta entre elites culturales, instituciones y sectores de la burguesía industrial en pos de la instalación del arte concreto como tendencia hegemónica en el panorama brasileño. El matrimonio Bittencourt era muy entusiasta de la obra de Bill: en 1952, visitaron al artista en Zürich y adquirieron dos obras para el MAM-RJ: *Construção em metal* (1937) y *Composição hexagonal composta de 280 quadrados* (1948/52).¹

Bill era un artista bien conocido en el ámbito artístico brasileño ya que en 1951 había realizado su primera exposición retrospectiva en el Museu de Arte de São Paulo y su obra *Unidad Tripartita* había sido galardonada con el 1^{er} premio en escultura de la I Bienal. Para el suizo este viaje implicaba entrar en contacto directo con un ámbito que resultaba mucho más promisorio para sus propuestas que el panorama europeo de posguerra. Además era la oportunidad de conocer la arquitectura brasileña que desde la década anterior venía siendo rotundamente consagrada a nivel internacional. En fin, era el momento de pasar a las tres

* Este trabajo es parte de mi tesis doctoral titulada “Abstracción entre Argentina y Brasil. Inscripción regional e interconexiones del arte concreto: 1944-1960”, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2007. El viaje a Zürich fue realizado con una beca otorgada por la Secretaría de Cultura de la Presidencia de la Nación. En relación con las investigaciones realizadas en esa ciudad, quiero agradecer a Jakob y Chantal Bill el haberme facilitado gentilmente el acceso a sus archivos y a Regina Vogel su valiosa colaboración.

¹ *Exposição permanente. Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro*, Rio de Janeiro, MAM-RJ, 1953. Véase también Max Bill, carta a Tomás Maldonado, Zürich, 21 de abril de 1953, Archivo Tomás Maldonado, Milán.

dimensiones las fantasías construidas a partir de diálogos, cartas, catálogos, revistas y fotos; era el momento de confrontar el modelo y experimentar la realidad tropical.

El matrimonio Bill llegó a Rio de Janeiro el 26 de mayo; fue recibido en aeropuerto Galeão por un grupo de amigos y admiradores.² Desde los meses previos a su llegada los diarios cariocas y fundamentalmente *Correio da Manhã* habían realizado una cobertura total sobre la venida de Bill a Brasil, publicando casi diariamente textos sobre su desarrollo artístico y las actividades de la recién fundada HfG de Ulm, además de fotografías de sus obras.³ Evidentemente, las expectativas respecto del viaje de este artista eran elevadas. El jueves 27 de mayo los Bittencourt realizaron, en su departamento de la Av. Altântica, un cóctel de presentación al que asistieron el vice-presidente del gobierno de Vargas, João Café Filho, ministros, senadores, diputados, gobernadores, diplomáticos, además de escritores, arquitectos y artistas: entre ellos, Abraham Palatnik, Lygia Pape, Ivan Serpa, Décio Vieira, Roberto Burle Marx, Noemia, Djanira, Oscar Niemeyer, Affonso Reidy, los hermanos Roberto, Manuel Bandeira y el argentino Tomás Maldonado.⁴

Bill estuvo en Rio de Janeiro y en São Paulo: visitó las ciudades y sus emprendimientos edilicios, entró en contacto con artistas y arquitectos y dictó varias conferencias. Desde el comienzo de su estadía las negativas opiniones brindadas a la prensa sobre los nuevos edificios brasileños fueron el estigma de su derrotero. Desde el inicio de la visita, el contacto con la prensa pareció haber resultado complejo. Por un lado, el nivel de expectativas de los medios respecto de esta recepción se correspondió con un intenso asedio mediático por recuperar las impresiones del recién llegado. La prensa daba espectacularidad a sus declaraciones; en una de las primeras notas luego de su llegada un titular decía: “Max Bill: ‘Arte figurativa é arte de parasitas’”.⁵ Por otro lado, Bill argüía que los medios malinterpretaban sus declaraciones y, por ende, buscaba constantemente nuevas posibilidades de

² Jayme Maurício, “Bons Ventos no Itamarati”, *Correio da Manhã*, Rio de Janeiro, 20 de mayo de 1953, Archivo Bill.

³ “Max Bill, futuro reitor da escola superior de Ulm”, *Correio da Manhã*, Rio de Janeiro, 18 de enero de 1953; “Artes plásticas”, *Correio da Manhã*, Rio de Janeiro, 14 de febrero de 1953; “Bons ventos no Itamarati”, *Correio da Manhã*, Rio de Janeiro, 20 de mayo de 1953; “Max Bill”, *Correio da Manhã*, Rio de Janeiro, 23 de mayo de 1953, p. 2. Archivo Bill.

⁴ Antonio Bento, “Max Bill no Rio”, *Diário Carioca*, Rio de Janeiro, 28 de mayo de 1953; “Presença de Max Bill”, *Correio da Manhã*, Rio de Janeiro, 28 de mayo de 1953; Archivo Bill.

⁵ *Ibid.*

manifestarse en la prensa; esta situación lo ubicó cotidianamente en las páginas de los diarios durante su estadía.

Las críticas del invitado sobre la arquitectura moderna cayeron como una desagradable sorpresa en un medio acostumbrado a recolectar elogios en torno a esta manifestación de identidad internacional y moderna brasileña. Esto provocó una efervescencia mediática: todos los días en los diarios paulistas y cariocas aparecían notas sobre las apreciaciones del suizo que manifestaban la indignación en torno al cuestionamiento de su producción cultural más exitosa. En este clima de conflictos, la revista carioca *Manchete*, en su edición del 13 de junio, daría a conocer la entrevista realizada durante su estadía en esta ciudad en la que Bill expresaba sin tapujos sus apreciaciones sobre la arquitectura moderna en Brasil.

En esta nota, el suizo hacía afirmaciones rotundas. Sobre el Ministério de Educação e Saúde (MES), obra de Oscar Niemeyer, Carlos Leão, Affonso Reidy, Jorge Moreira y Ernani Vasconcellos, realizada bajo las máximas y el asesoramiento de Le Corbusier, Bill manifestaba sus profundas disidencias con esta gloria de la nueva arquitectura brasileña: “Quanto ao edifício do Ministério de Educação, não me agradou de todo. Falta-lhe sentido e proporção humana; ante aquela massa imensa o pedestre sente-se esmagado. Não concordo, tão pouco, com o partido adotado no projeto, que preferiu condenar o pátio interno construindo o prédio sobre pilotis.”⁶ Sobre el conjunto arquitectónico Pampulha (1942-1944), encargado por Juscelino Kubitschek desde la Prefeitura de Belo Horizonte y realizado por Niemeyer, Bill era aún más categórico. En la crítica a este emprendimiento, la clave estaba en los destinatarios del proyecto recreativo que consistía en una *boite*, un yacht club, un casino y la capilla São Francisco ubicados alrededor de un lago artificial.⁷

A arquitetura moderna brasileira padece um pouco deste amor ao inútil, ao simplesmente decorativo. Ao projetar-se, por exemplo, um conjunto como Pampulha não se levou em conta a sua função social. O sentimento da coletividade humana é aí substituído pelo individualismo exagerado. Niemeyer, apesar do seu evidente talento, projetou-o por instinto, por simples amor à forma pela forma; elaborou em torno de curvas caprichosas

⁶ Flávio Aquino, “Max Bill critica a nossa moderna arquitetura”, *Manchete*, nº 60, Rio de Janeiro, 13 de junio de 1953, pp. 38-39.

⁷ Yves Bruand, *Arquitetura contemporânea no Brasil*, São Paulo, Perspectiva, 1999, pp. 109-111.

e gratuitas. O resultado disso é um barroquismo excessivo que não pertence á arquitetura nem à escultura. Afirmo, mais uma vez, que em arquitetura tudo deve ter sua lógica, sua função imediata.⁸

El suizo basaba su teoría estética en la relación simultánea del trinomio forma, función y belleza: para él, la forma actuaba como un elemento articulador entre cualidad y funcionalidad. Así, un objeto de diseño o una arquitectura debían revelar claramente sus posibilidades de uso, la lógica económica y tecnológica de su fabricación y el sentido de la operación formal. Esta perspectiva da una clave para comprender porqué la producción arquitectónica brasileña le generaba tantas cavilaciones.

Las contradicciones que planteaba la cuestión social en el Brasil era un punto clave: ¿cómo podía pensarse en arquitectura moderna cuando no estaba resuelto el problema habitacional para grandes porcentajes de la población? El desordenado crecimiento urbano y la desenfrenada especulación con la tierra que habían caracterizado el desarrollo de las principales ciudades brasileñas en la primera mitad del siglo constituían una traba para el desarrollo de una arquitectura “saludable”. Además, la precariedad de las condiciones técnico constructivas de un sistema productivo aún caracterizado por una industrialización incipiente y por una supervivencia del modelo básico agroexportador hacían impensable todo intento de racionalización y estandarización.⁹ Bill se exasperaba al ver la utilización del vocabulario moderno al servicio de las veleidades de la burguesía, como en el caso de Pampulha y de las necesidades de un estado autoritario, como en el caso del MES, realizado bajo el gobierno de Vargas. Las complejas negociaciones y tensiones entre Estado, burguesía y vanguardia parecían incomprensibles para la mirada de Bill.

Sin embargo, además de la cuestión social, la crítica de Bill también se basaba en el proceso de deglución y adaptación del modelo de Le Corbusier realizado en el Brasil. Bill discordaba con el uso que los arquitectos brasileños habían dado a los elementos clave de la arquitectura lecorbusiana como los pilotis,

⁸ Flávio Aquino, “Max Bill critica a nossa moderna arquitetura”, *op. cit.*

⁹ Carlos Ferreira Martins, “‘Hay algo de irracional...’ Apuntes sobre la historiografía de la arquitectura brasileña”, *Block*, n° 4, Buenos Aires, Universidad Torcuato Di Tella, 1999, pp. 8-22.

los paneles de vidrio y el *brissoleil*.¹⁰ A través de sus críticas a la arquitectura brasileña, Bill estaba librando en suelo sudamericano una batalla contra el ideario de Le Corbusier. Precisamente, como lo había notado la prensa contemporánea, sus objeciones a los edificios brasileños estaban teñidas de un encono particular con el modelo elegido.

Interrogado permanentemente sobre la arquitectura moderna, Bill terminaría de definir su punto de vista en São Paulo, el último punto de su visita. Antes de partir, Bill decidió dar una última conferencia para dejar en claro sus puntos de vista. El 9 de junio en la Faculdade de Arquitetura da Universidade de São Paulo (FAU) Bill expresó su perspectiva sobre la arquitectura brasileña. Se dirigió principalmente a los estudiantes, intentado explicar puntualmente las apreciaciones que habían repercutido negativamente en el público brasileño. Comenzaba calificando la unidad habitacional Predregulho en Rio como un éxito absoluto a nivel arquitectónico, urbanístico y social. Reconocer la validez indiscutible de este conjunto, era una estrategia argumentativa que le permitía, luego de una valoración altamente afirmativa, referir a los puntos de discordia. En primer lugar, señalaba las expectativas que sus declaraciones suscitaron desde su llegada al Brasil.

Aqui chegando, há quinze dias, os repórteres se lançaram sobre mim, questionando-me sobre pontos que, para um recém chegado como eu, não eram fáceis de serem respondidos. A questão “standard” era: “O que é que o senhor pensa da arquitetura brasileira? O que é que pensa da arte brasileira?” Eu não conhecia a arte e a arquitetura brasileira, senão através de reproduções e, dessa maneira, tem-se sempre um aspecto um pouco deformado.¹¹

Dividido entre dar una linda conferencia sobre arte y arquitectura como arte o manifestar su pensamiento respecto de la situación de la arquitectura brasileña, el suizo elegía la segunda opción. Parecía preciso volver a repetir aquello que ya había circulado en los medios y que era tema de debate en los ambientes culturales del país.

¹⁰ Antônio Bento, “Opiniões de Max Bill”, *Diário Carioca*, Rio de Janeiro, 6 de junio de 1953; Quirino Campofiorito, “Tudo velho como Noé”, *O Jornal*, Rio de Janeiro, 7 de junio de 1953; Archivo Bill.

¹¹ Max Bill, “O arquiteto, a arquitetura, a sociedade”, *Hábitat*, nº 14, São Paulo, enero-febrero de 1954, s/p.

É, portanto [...] que vos falo, aos estudantes principalmente, aos futuros arquitetos do Brasil, de um país onde o volume da construção ultrapassa toda a imaginação, onde a necessidade de construir é ainda, e sempre será, de uma importância primordial. Sois vos, pois, que formareis a feição das cidades brasileiras amanhã. Eu conjeturava, portanto, sobre o melhor que poderia vos contar. E resolvi dizer, finalmente ao invés de lindas palavras, a verdade sobre a profissão do arquiteto, e a verdade sobre a arquitetura brasileira. É portanto uma crítica, e como fui convidado oficialmente, quero vos dizer algo que possa ser útil para o futuro de vosso país. Falarei das cosas que pude notar aqui. Daqui a dois dias partirei. Pode ser que o avião caia nos Andes. Quero ser, portanto, franco e sem hesitações protocolares. Ficaria desgostoso se não manifestasse minha opinião: vosso país está em perigo de cair no mais terrível academicismo anti-social, no plano da arquitetura moderna. Quero, pois, falar da arquitetura, como de uma arte social, uma arte que não está sujeita a ser posta de lado nos dias do futuro, o que hoje convém, não convirá mais, quando for mudado o que se chama “estilo”.¹²

El tono de Bill era dramático: como ha señalado con ironía Ana María Rigotti, el suizo “temblaba” de pensar que los jóvenes estudiantes hubieran sido seducidos por tanta extravagancia y despilfarro.¹³ Bill no podía esperar a llegar a Europa para realizar meditadas reflexiones: si el avión se estrellase en los Andes sus palabras de alarma y preocupación quedarían por siempre silenciadas.¹⁴ Dramática también era su experiencia: él, que se había dejado seducir frente a las espectaculares fotografías aparecidas en publicaciones internacionales a partir de su estadía en el Brasil, no podía más que contrastar como evidencia la distancia entre esa realidad y aquellas representaciones.

Así, el suizo comenzó abordando los elementos de la arquitectura brasileña que utilizados como fórmulas “repetidas sem razão” conformaban un academicismo moderno. El primer elemento era la forma orgánica, el plano libre. Atribuyendo a Le Corbusier la introducción de este elemento en jardines y

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Ana María Rigotti, “Brazil deceives”, *Block*, nº 4, Buenos Aires, Universidad Torcuato Di Tella, 1999. Este artículo, que resulta muy analítico respecto de la mirada de los arquitectos modernos europeos sobre el fenómeno brasileño, confunde la visita de Bill en mayo de 1953 con el encuentro realizado en ocasión a la II Bienal de Arquitectura en enero de 1954. Bill también participó de este encuentro pero no como jurado de la sección arquitectura sino como jurado de la Bienal de Artes Plásticas.

¹⁴ Max Bill, “O arquiteto, a arquitetura, a sociedade”, *op. cit.*

arquitecturas a través de los muros curvos, para Bill la forma libre sólo tenía sentido si existían razones funcionales; la utilización que se había dado a este elemento entre los brasileños era “puramente decorativa e nada tem que ver com uma arquitetura séria”.¹⁵ El segundo elemento era el *pan de verre* o muro de vidrio. La utilización de este elemento era atribuida a Gropius citando el edificio del Bauhaus de Dessau; luego, la utilización de este recurso por parte de Le Corbusier había incorporado los *brises-soleil* como un complemento necesario del *pan de verre* para controlar el calor y la claridad. En relación con ambos elementos, la crítica de Bill radicaba en la utilización indiscriminada de esta solución sin atender debidamente la situación climática del país. El cuarto dispositivo era la concepción de los edificios montados sobre pilotis y por ende la anulación del patio interno. Este fue un punto clave de la argumentación de Bill.

Si bien planteaba su adhesión a la utilización de la planta libre –“antes da minha viagem ao Brasil, pensei, como muitos arquitetos de vanguarda européia que a solução do Le Corbusier [...] seria o ideal de uma futura cidade”¹⁶- la crítica, en primera instancia, radicaba en el uso de este elemento sin la adecuación necesaria a las condiciones geográficas del lugar. Esta aclaración estaba dirigida a las críticas que había realizado al MES y que tan terrible recepción habían causado.

Já antes da minha viagem ao Brasil [...] pude constatar que o pátio, que deve ser substituído por esta nova concepção lecorbusiana, tem funções que preencher que seriam perdidas, mudando a concepção. [...] É, portanto, necessário encontrar as melhores soluções, de acordo com a nossa época, utilizando as vantagens dos pátios, suprimindo seus defeitos. [...] Esta constatação deve ser, por consequência, um ataque contra o famoso Ministério da Educação no Rio de Janeiro, que acredito, não foi concebido conforme as condições orgânicas do país. Isto não quer dizer que eu não tenha todo o meu respeito para com esses arquitetos, mas, assim mesmo, sou obrigado a constatar que eles incorrem em erros, seguindo uma doutrina que em seu país não é utilizável a não ser que haja grandes correções.¹⁷

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Además, Bill llamaba la atención sobre el aspecto formal de los pilotis. Bill aludía a la libertad morfológica que adoptaban estos módulos portantes en la arquitectura brasileña y fundamentalmente en la obra de Niemeyer. Formas “barrocas” que para él sólo representaban un manierismo decorativo sin función. Refiriéndose a los pilares triangulares utilizados por Niemeyer en el edificio en construcción en la rua Barão de Itapetininga (en la actualidad: Galerías California), Bill señalaba

Nesse edifício vi coisas terríveis. É o fim da arquitetura moderna. É um edifício anti-social, sem responsabilidade, não só para aquele que vai utilizá-lo como locatário, mas para o freguês que lá irá para fazer as compras. [...] Lá encontrei a última deformação da forma livre e a utilização, a mais fantasista, dos pilotis. É uma floresta virgem da construção, no pior sentido, é a anarquia completa. [...] Quando entrardes no local da obra sentireis imediatamente uma formidável mistura de sistemas de construção, de pilotis largos, de pilotis finos, de pilotis de formas fantásticas, sem nenhuma finalidade construtiva, colocados em diferentes direções. [...] Os muros e os pilotis entrecruzaram-se sem razão, as formas destroem-se, cortam-se. É a desordem, a mais gigantesca, que jamais vi no local de uma obra. [...] Prédios desse gênero nascem de um espírito que não tem modéstia; não tem responsabilidade para com as necessidades humanas.¹⁸

Casi como una exclamación desesperada, Bill exhortaba a que esos jóvenes estudiantes se comprometieran con las responsabilidades de la arquitectura realmente moderna, sana y al servicio de las necesidades del hombre y no con los ritmos de una ciudad que vertiginosamente necesitaba construirse.

Temo que entre vós se encontrem também os amadores desse espírito, e como vos quero ajudar a não cair em erros desse gênero, quero vos explicar, em algumas palavras o que é a profissão do arquiteto. E se somente um ou dois entre vos ireis compreendê-lo, serei já muito feliz. Sois aqueles que irão lutar para uma arquitetura realmente moderna, para uma arquitetura sadia, ao serviço do homem.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Las críticas de Bill estaban especialmente dirigidas a Niemeyer: Bill denunciaba la espectacularización arquitectónica como modo de expresión individual. La figura del arquitecto-artista que materializa su sensibilidad e intuiciones en muros de cemento era, para el suizo, una irresponsabilidad profesional y un peligro inconmensurable. Bill no podía reflexionar sobre las adaptaciones y traducciones del modelo porque le era imposible repensar su lugar de enunciación: él era el heredero de los verdaderos principios modernos, el guardián de la pureza constructiva. Recuérdese que había sido alumno del Bauhaus, había participado en *Abstraction Création* y fue quién redefinió y promocionó la apuesta en torno al arte concreto lanzada por Theo van Doesburg.

Precisamente, su linaje moderno lo había ubicado como un referente para los artistas plásticos. Tanto en la Argentina como en Brasil Bill había encontrado fluidos canales de interlocución y espacios de intervención que resultaban impensables para su situación en el ámbito europeo. A su vez, los artistas argentinos y brasileños hallaron en la propuesta del arte concreto de Bill un modelo sistemático para las búsquedas abstractas ya instaladas en los circuitos locales. Entonces, dado que él era un referente para las artes plásticas, es posible pensar que Bill también buscaba volverse un modelo en el ámbito de la arquitectura. Bajo esta luz se comprende que la constante aparición de Bill en la prensa para aclarar las supuestas tergiversaciones de sus opiniones fue, en realidad, una estrategia que utilizó para cooptar los medios y refrendar sus verdades una y otra vez.

Pero, la “voz” arquitectónica ya estaba elegida y era una relación preexistente a la por él establecida. Le Corbusier había realizado su primera visita al Brasil en 1929 y fue en 1936 que Lucio Costa sugirió a Gustavo Capanema, el ministro de educación del gobierno de Vargas, traerlo para asesorar sobre el proyecto del MES. Asimismo, la producción arquitectónica de Le Corbusier durante los 50 tiene una gran empatía con algunas obras de la arquitectura moderna brasileña. A partir de la posguerra su ideario de fusión de artes plásticas y arquitectura en una totalidad se manifestó, por ejemplo, en la capilla de Ronchamp realizada en 1951.

En este combate entre tradiciones e innovaciones, los arquitectos modernos brasileños harían sentir su desilusión, la incomprensión recibida y la incapacidad para percibir cómo se desarrollaba la cultura moderna fuera de la coyuntura europea. Lucio Costa publicó en *Manchete* una respuesta a Bill. Desde el título ya

marcaba con ironía la recepción de las críticas del maestro europeo: “Nuestra arquitectura moderna: oportunidad perdida”.²⁰ Costa no adhería al alegato de Bill a favor de la funcionalidad; su posicionamiento sostenía el valor plástico de la arquitectura. Costa defendía la realización del MES refutando las críticas de Bill sobre el uso de pilotis y resaltando el uso de los azulejos en función de la recuperación de la herencia lusitana. También respaldaba el conjunto de Pampulha como ejemplo pionero del desarrollo de la arquitectura moderna brasileña. Respecto de la capilla de São Francisco parte de este conjunto, Costa refería a la apreciación peyorativa de Bill en tanto barroca. Replanteando el eje del análisis, Costa cambiaba el signo al adjetivo “barroco” y filiaba esta arquitectura moderna, clara y universalista con la reelaboración afectiva de los elementos de la propia tradición. Cito a Costa:

“Ora graças, pois se trata no caso de um barroquismo de legitima e pura filiação nativa que bem mostra que não descendermos de relojeiros mas de fabricantes de igrejas barrocas. Aliás, foi precisamente lá, nas Minas Gerais, que elas se fizeram, com maior graça e invenção.”²¹

Evidentemente, esta arquitectura no sólo no se correspondían con las exigencias de funcionalidad billianas sino que establecía conexiones en torno a la identidad y a la historia vernácula. Otilia Arantes ha señalado que la originalidad de la contribución brasileña en torno al movimiento moderno consistió, precisamente, en la recuperación y preservación de la arquitectura tradicional. Cito a Arantes: “Son de esta manera, ante todo modernos y no nostálgicos del pasado (o sea académicos) y, justamente por ser modernos son los primeros en vincularse –en otro registro- con la tradición.”²²

Me interesa cerrar mi planteo con un comentario gracioso pero elocuente aparecido en la prensa paulista respecto de las repercusiones producidas por el viaje de Bill. El diario *Folha da Tarde* reproducía un diálogo entre Cândido Portinari y el crítico Rubem Braga que daba cuenta de los desequilibrios que la fortuna crítica de Bill había alcanzado después de su visita. En la conversación, Braga señalaba la admiración que le

²⁰ Lucio Costa, “A nossa arquitetura moderna oportunidade perdida”, *Manchete*, n° 63, Rio de Janeiro, 4 de julio de 1953. Reproducido en João Bandeira, *Arte concreta paulista. Documentos, op. cit.*, p. 34-35.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Otilia Arantes, “Esquema Lucio Costa. Un milagro, mucha arquitectura y un último espejismo”, *Block*, n° 4, Buenos Aires, Universidad Torcuato Di Tella, 1999, p. 44.

suscitaba *Unidad Tripartita* por su armonía, dignidad y belleza. Portinari concordaba dubitativamente y decía: “É, mas, de fato, eu prefiro um Ford – porque anda...”²³

Evidentemente, belleza y función en la constitución de la forma eran puntos que en el Brasil connotaban otras varias dimensiones. Las reiteradas advertencias de Bill sobre la funcionalidad volvían como un *boomerang* en esta irónica conclusión de Portinari. El rol del arte en la estructura social era un núcleo clave en el debate que se desarrollaba en los circuitos culturales brasileños pero probablemente Bill no conocía con exactitud los términos del problema. Evidentemente, tradición, modernidad, identidad y transformación social eran horizontes en disputa por propuestas estéticas que acentuaban de manera diferencial la interrelación entre estas ideas.

²³ Rubem Braga, “Portinari”, *Folha da Tarde*, São Paulo, 24 de junio de 1953; Archivo Bill.

Brazilian Concretism

My paper is about the dialogue between Concrete Art in Germany and in Brazil. The Brazilian artists were inspired by Max Bill, Bauhaus, Theo Van Doesburg and the ULM School of Theory. The contact between the Brazilian artists and Concrete Art were in the 1950's. After the First Art Biennial in Sao Paulo, Max Bill received the first prize for his work "*Tripartite Unit.*" This work inspired the Concretism movement in Brazil.

Brazilian Concretism was formed by two groups: Ruptura, from São Paulo headed by Waldemar Cordeiro, and Frente from Rio de Janeiro headed by Ferreira Gullar. In 1956, the first exposition of concrete art was unveiled in Brazil, together with the Concrete Manifest. Some of the artists that participated in the exposition were Lygia Clark, Waldemar Cordeiro, Franz Weissmann, Geraldo de Barros, Aluisio Carvão, Lygia Pape and Hélio Oiticica. Brazilian Concretism introduced an art form that was mathematical rationalism, an anti-naturalistic and geometric, industrial art. After the break up of the group at the end of the 1950's, a new Brazilian Art movement began; Neoconcretism.

Tatiane de Oliveira Elias

Concretismo no Brasil

Introdução

O surgimento da Arte Concreta no Brasil se deve grande parte à passagem de Max Bill e suas obras no país. Também contribuiu o diálogo com a escola de ULM. Em 1951 Max Bill recebe o prêmio da Primeira Bienal de Artes em São Paulo, com a sua obra *Unidade Tripartida*. Depois de realizada a Primeira Bienal, Max Bill, a convite do ministro das Relações Exteriores viaja para o Brasil. Bill realiza palestras no MAM do Rio de Janeiro e na Faculdade de Arquitetura de São Paulo, sobre o tema *O Arquiteto, a Arquitetura e a Sociedade*.

I

I Exposição de Max Bill no Brasil

Em 1950 acontece a primeira exposição das obras de Max Bill no Brasil: projetos arquitetônicos, esculturas e pinturas, no MASP. O Museu de São Paulo apresenta as obras de Bill séries em progressões de formas geométricas elementares, o processo das aproximações cromáticas de limite-não-limite e as construções espaciais em figuras topológicas, como a fita de Moebius, que originou a escultura *Unidade Tripartida*. Através desta exposição chegam os postulados da arte concreta aos artistas paulistas.

II

Primeira Bienal de Artes de São Paulo

Antes de falar sobre o Concretismo no Brasil irei dissertar primeiramente a respeito da criação da Primeira Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, no ano de 1951, em São Paulo, sob o governo de Lucas Nogueira Garcez, patrocinada por Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, um grande industrial paulistano. Matarazzo quis implantar a Bienal paulista segundo os moldes da Bienal de Veneza e relacionar a arte nacional com a internacional. “Ao criar a Bienal, Matarazzo¹ pretendia confrontar a arte brasileira com a de outros países, mas acabou provocando a reavaliação da produção nacional”.²

¹ Francisco Matarazzo era conhecido por seus amigos como Ciccilo.

² AMARANTE, Leonor. *As Bienais de São Paulo 1951-1987*. www.artezero.com.br/histórico.html. (accessed Dezembro 05,2001).

Segundo o crítico Zanini, “a capital paulista mostrava-se então fértil de iniciativas culturais, de que são exemplos a Escola de Arte Dramática, o Teatro Brasileiro de Comédia, (...) e a companhia Cinematográfica Vera Cruz, além da *Bienal*”.³ Havia um intenso crescimento no investimento cultural no início da década de 1950, devido aos imigrantes dotados de capital que vinham para o Brasil, refugiados da guerra.

A *Bienal* possibilitou aos brasileiros entrarem em contato com a obra de Max Bill, neste caso, *Unidade Tripartida*⁴, escultura feita de aço, sem pontas, formada em uma mesma superfície. A obra deixava um espaço vazado entre a linha de aço e o espaço que se mantinha dentro dela. Na *Unidade Tripartida* o olhar do espectador ultrapassa a obra ao mesmo tempo em que se prende quando se depara com o aço inoxidável.⁵ Nas palavras de Max Bill:

“A escultura em questão é uma faixa que tem a mesma largura em todos os pontos. Suas margens são, portanto, paralelas. Aparentemente, trata-se de uma dupla superfície, que está separada do espaço circundante por meio de linhas paralelas que formam um novo espaço. Este corpo é, além do mais, um fenômeno curioso, porque essa dupla superfície que forma um novo espaço não possui na realidade senão uma superfície e porque as margens aparentemente paralelas formam uma só e única linha que é paralela a si mesma. Em seguida, realizei outras construções espaciais de dupla superfície que na realidade formam uma só, limitada por uma única linha”.⁶

O prêmio da Bienal de São Paulo foi concedido à escultura *Unidade Tripartida*, de Bill. Esta obra influenciou muitos artistas brasileiros, tais como Franz Weissmann, Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, Waldemar Cordeiro e Geraldo de Barros. Lygia Pape fez a seguinte declaração sobre a influência da *Bienal*: “É claro que com a *I Bienal* de São Paulo em 1951 e o prêmio de Max Bill (...) havia uma troca de informação, havia intercâmbio. (...) O Ivan foi dar aula no Museu de Arte Moderna e eu, e eu, Hélio Oiticica e César Oiticica começamos curiosos a rondar o museu e a trabalhar com o Ivan”.⁷

Depois de realizada a *Primeira Bienal*, Max Bill viaja para o Brasil, em 1953, a convite do ministro das Relações Exteriores. Bill realiza palestras no MAM do Rio de Janeiro e na Faculdade de Arquitetura de São Paulo, sobre o tema *O Arquiteto, a Arquitetura e a*

³ ZANINI, Walter. *História geral da arte no Brasil: “Transformações do meio ambiente”*. São Paulo, vol 2 of Instituto Walther Moreira Salles, 1983, 646.

⁴“O prêmio da *Bienal* de São Paulo de 1951, concedido à peça de Bill *Unidade Tripartida* foi sintoma do entusiasmo local pelos postulados racionalistas da arte concreta. (...) E fez grassar entre os que aqui estavam uma tendência geométrica inequívoca e os conceitos construtivos implícitos nessa tendência. Enquanto a Europa e os Estados Unidos começavam a mergulhar no informalismo, a América Latina, o Brasil e a Argentina em particular, retomavam a tradição construtiva e transformavam-na no seu projeto de vanguarda”. BRITO, Ronaldo. *Neoconcretismo vértice e ruptura*. FUNARTE, RJ, 1985, 32-33.

⁵ Nas palavras de Ferreira Gullar “Essas obras versam, no fundo, um problema matemático ilustrado pelo conhecido exemplo da *Fita de Moebius*, experiência que revela a continuidade de uma superfície que anula o conceito euclidiano de espaço.” GULLAR, Ferreira. *Etapas da Arte Contemporânea, Max Bill*. Ed. Nobel, SP, 1985, 217.

⁶ GULLAR, Ferreira. *Etapas da Arte Contemporânea, Max Bill*. Ed. Nobel, SP, 1985, 218.

⁷ PAPE, Lygia. In: (Org.) FUNARTE. *Abstracionismo Geométrico e informal*. FUNARTE, Rio de Janeiro, 1987, 153.

Sociedade. Nestas palestras, Bill disserta sobre a arquitetura brasileira. Em uma entrevista, Max Bill revela que, para ele, no Rio de Janeiro, antiga capital, havia edifícios modernos, mas faltava a arquitetura acadêmica.⁸ O arquiteto elogia o edifício dos *Pedregulhos*⁹ e a capacidade dos arquitetos brasileiros de projetar planos urbanísticos para o Rio de Janeiro. No mesmo ano acontece no Hotel Quitandinha, em Petrópolis a I Exposição Nacional de Arte Abstrata.

Como se pode observar, a realização da Bienal foi muito importante para o desenvolvimento da arte brasileira: “O Salto foi dado com a Bienal, o aparecimento dos artistas suíços e a posição de Mário, defendendo teoricamente esses trabalhos. Havia um grupo formado em torno dele e um que se formava em São Paulo através de certa influência de Buenos Aires.”¹⁰

III

Grupo Ruptura

A *Primeira Bienal*¹¹ deixou fortes tendências geométricas no país. Um ano após a *Bienal*, um grupo de artistas em torno de Waldemar Cordeiro lança um manifesto denominado *Ruptura*, no qual definem sua posição contra a arte figurativa predominante no Brasil até os anos 1950. Assinam o manifesto: Charroux, Cordeiro, Geraldo De Barros, Fejer, Haar, Sacilotto e Wladyslaw – estes ficaram conhecidos como “grupo Ruptura”.

O termo *ruptura* indicava um rompimento com a perspectiva, pinturas naturalistas, acadêmicas e tonalismos anti-naturalismo, abstração lírica, falso geometrismo. Os artistas condenavam a ação individualista, rompendo com as formas de arte consideradas “antigas”. Noutras palavras, estavam rompendo com a arte tida como figurativa, predominante no Brasil, uma ruptura com o “sistema tradicional” das artes naturalísticas.

No *Manifesto*, os artistas diziam se distinguir dos que criavam formas novas a partir de princípios velhos – mais explicitamente, quando Waldemar Cordeiro fala, no *Manifesto*, de formas novas que partem de princípios velhos, está se referindo à pintura de Cícero Dias¹². Cordeiro se utiliza da crítica de Milliet sobre a pintura de Dias para explicar os

⁸ Cf. “Acha-se desde ontem em São Paulo o conhecido arquiteto suíço Max Bill”, *Folha da Manhã*, s/d, Arquivo Bienal, São Paulo.

⁹ Projetado por Affonso E. Reidy

¹⁰ PAPE, Lygia. In: (Org.) FUNARTE. *Abstracionismo geométrico e informal*. FUNARTE, Rio de Janeiro, 1987, 87.

¹¹ “...a *Bienal* pôde, por sua vez, despertar um movimento interno de aproximação artística entre as diversas províncias culturais do país, e notadamente entre os dois principais centros, Rio e São Paulo.” PEDROSA, Mário. “A Bienal de cá para lá”. In: (Org.) GULLAR, Ferreira. *Arte Brasileira Hoje Situação e Perspectiva*. ed. Paz e Terra, Rio de Janeiro, 1973, 9.

¹² “No Brasil, o movimento construtivista só começou ao final da década de 40. Seu verdadeiro e primeiro pioneiro foi Cícero Dias que, em 1946, na capital francesa começou a pintar telas rigorosamente geométricas”. MILLIET, Aracy Amaral. Surgimento da Abstração geométrica no Brasil: De Cícero Dias a Mário Pedrosa. In: (Org.) Amaral, Aracy. *Arte construtiva no Brasil - Coleção Adolpho Leirner*. Ed. DBAM, SP, 55.

seus postulados em relação à pintura abstrata: “A pintura de Cícero Dias não se diferenciava de sua pintura figurativa para a sua pintura abstrata, (...) Dias utilizava os mesmos tons de cores na pintura geométrica que empregava em sua pintura figurativa.”¹³

O *Grupo Ruptura* explica, então, o que entende como “novo”:

- *as expressões baseadas nos novos princípios artísticos;*
- *todas as experiências que tendem à renovação dos valores essenciais da arte visual (espaço-tempo, movimento e matéria);*
- *a intuição artística dotada de princípios claros e inteligentes e de grandes possibilidades de desenvolvimento prático;*
- *conferir à arte um lugar definido no quadro do trabalho espiritual contemporâneo, considerando-a um meio de conhecimento deduzível, situando-a acima da opinião, exigindo para o seu juízo conhecimento prévio.*¹⁴

De acordo com o *Grupo Ruptura*, o mais importante é uma pintura geométrica - as linhas e os pontos são concretos em um quadro, diferentemente de uma mulher ou um animal. O grupo utilizava as teorias da *Gestalt*. O que interessa, nesta pintura, é o que se vê, sem passar pelo intelecto. Os artistas trabalhavam, assim, com a questão do espaço-tempo e queriam uma pintura acessível a todos. Pintavam segundo suas intuições.

O crítico de arte, Sérgio Milliet critica duramente o *Manifesto* do grupo. Cordeiro responde: “Lamenta inicialmente o Sr. Milliet a concisão das declarações contidas no nosso manifesto e, principalmente, a ausência de exemplificações esclarecedoras. Tem ele razão: o manifesto distribuído no Museu de Arte Moderna (...) está longe de construir um tratado teórico e mesmo um estudo histórico da arte contemporânea”.¹⁵

Continua ainda o artista Cordeiro, “Os novos princípios artísticos podem ser resumidos da seguinte forma: a) Construção espacial bidimensional (o plano); b) Atonalismo (as cores primárias e as complementares); c) O movimento linear (fatores de proximidade e semelhança).”¹⁶ Para o artista, a arte do *Grupo Ruptura*, “é geométrica, não geometrial”.¹⁷

¹³ “Julgamos hedonista o não-figurativismo do Sr. Cícero Dias porque cria ‘formas novas de princípios velhos’. Demonstrá-lo-emos aproveitando as palavras insuspeitas do Sr. Milliet: ‘O Cícero Dias das telas abstratas não difere do autor que conhecemos pintando ingênuas naturezas-mortas e cenas do Nordeste. São os mesmos verdes e amarelos de outrora, e são as mesmas formas e composições”. CORDEIRO, Waldemar. “Ruptura”. In: (Org.) FUNARTE. *Abstracionismo geométrico e informal*. FUNARTE, Rio de Janeiro, 1987, 221.

¹⁴ *Manifesto Ruptura*, 1952.

¹⁵ CORDEIRO, Waldemar. “Ruptura”. In: (Org.) FUNARTE. *Abstracionismo geométrico e informal*. FUNARTE, Rio de Janeiro, 1987, 220.

¹⁶ CORDEIRO, Waldemar. “Ruptura”. In: (Org.) FUNARTE. *Abstracionismo geométrico e informal*. FUNARTE, Rio de Janeiro, 1987, 222.

¹⁷ CORDEIRO, Waldemar. “Ruptura”. In: (Org.) FUNARTE. *Abstracionismo geométrico e informal*. FUNARTE, Rio de Janeiro, 1987, 225.

O *Grupo Ruptura* era, para Cordeiro, um salto qualitativo que reivindicava a verdadeira linguagem das artes pictóricas, expressa através de linhas e de cores, bem como por meio da geometria - não fazendo imitação da natureza, não pintavam “pêras, nem homens”.¹⁸ O teórico do *Grupo Ruptura* posiciona-se a favor da abstração e contra a pintura figurativa. Para o *Grupo*, “os valores essenciais das artes visuais”¹⁹, expressos textualmente no *Manifesto Ruptura*, são “espaço-tempo, movimento e matéria”.²⁰

No Rio de Janeiro, sob liderança de Ivan Serpa, surge o Grupo Frente com tendências geométricas, como veremos a seguir.

IV

O Grupo Frente

O *Grupo Frente* foi criado em 1953 no Rio de Janeiro, mas sua primeira exposição acontece em 1954, integrada por “Aluíso Carvão (...), João José Silva Costa (...), Vincent Ibberson, Lygia Clark²¹, Lygia Pape (...), Ivan Serpa, Carlos Val, Décio Vieira (...), Abraham Palatnik, Hélio Oiticica e César Oiticica”.²² A segunda exposição do Grupo foi em 1954 e a última ocorreu em 1956.

O *Grupo Frente* surgiu com Ivan Serpa, que já ministrava aulas para um grupo de alunos. Certa vez, Serpa, em uma conversa com Ferreira Gullar, viu escrito em um papel a palavra “frente”; perguntou, então, a Gullar o que era, e o mesmo lhe respondeu que havia escrito em seu caderno tal palavra para demarcar-lhe a capa²³. Serpa teve a idéia de chamar o grupo de *Grupo Frente*. A primeira exposição do grupo contou até com uma artista primitivista, Elisa, que era aluna de Serpa, apesar de o grupo trabalhar com arte abstrata geométrica.

¹⁸ Cf. BELLUZZO, Ana Maria. Ruptura e Arte Concreta. In: (Org.) AMARAL, Aracy. *Arte Construtiva no Brasil - coleção Adolpho Leirner*. Ed. DBAM, SP, 1998, 97.

¹⁹ *Manifesto Ruptura*, 1952. agora in BELLUZZO, Ana Maria. Ruptura e Arte Concreta. In: (Org.) AMARAL, Aracy. *Arte Construtiva no Brasil - coleção Adolpho Leirner*. Ed. DBAM, SP, 1998, 94.

²⁰ BELLUZZO, Ana Maria. Ruptura e Arte Concreta. In: (Org.) AMARAL, Aracy. *Arte Construtiva no Brasil - coleção Adolpho Leirner*. Ed. DBAM, SP, 1998, 100.

²¹ Lygia Clark, em uma entrevista, afirma que não participou do *Grupo Frente*: “eu não participei. Nessa ocasião eu ainda estava em Paris (...) quando voltei de Paris encontrei o grupo concreto formado”. CLARK, Lygia. Entrevista com Lygia Clark. In: (Org.) FUNARTE. *Abstracionismo Geométrico e informal*. FUNARTE, Rio de Janeiro, 1987, 71.

²² ZANINI, Walter. *História geral da arte no Brasil: Transformações do meio ambiente*. São Paulo, 2 v of Instituto Walther Moreira Salles, 1983, 655.

²³ “Como o texto ainda não tinha nome escrevi, na primeira capa, a palavra ‘frente’. Ivan perguntou-me o que significava aquela palavra ali. (...) ‘Pois você me deu uma idéia. ‘frente’ pode ser o nome de nosso grupo””. BELLUZZO & GULLAR, Ferreira. O Grupo Frente e a reação neoconcreta. In: ARACY, Amaral. *Arte Construtiva no Brasil - coleção Adolpho Leirner*. Ed. DBAM, SP, 1998, 144.

A arte, para o *Grupo Frente*, segundo Mário Pedrosa, “visa uma altíssima missão social, qual de dar estilo à época e transformar os homens, educando-os a exercer os sentidos com plenitude e a modelar as próprias emoções”.²⁴

O *Grupo Frente* se dissolveu em 1956 com a adesão de alguns de seus membros ao *concretismo*. Em uma entrevista, Aluísio Carvão fala sobre o término do *Grupo Frente* e a inserção de alguns membros do grupo no concretismo:

“Quando é que o *Grupo Frente*, ou alguns elementos dele, passaram a se considerar concretos e não mais o *Grupo Frente*? AC—Essas coisas foram decorrência da presença de pessoas como Mário Pedrosa, Ferreira Gullar... O meio intelectual desse grupo então elaborou, começou a discutir um manifesto. Aqui no Rio não houve manifesto concretista. Havia uma turma de apresentação na exposição do grupo e houve emenda do grupo onde a palavra começou a se empregar, mas foi consequência da aproximação ou da chegada de pensadores e poetas como Gullar e Reynaldo Jardim”.²⁵

Os membros do *Grupo Frente* já trocavam idéias com o *Grupo Ruptura* e com os poetas do *Noigrandes*. A idéia de uma exposição sobre o concretismo no Brasil veio de Cordeiro, com a junção do *Grupo Frente* e *Ruptura*.

V

Concretismo no Brasil

O *Concretismo* surgiu com a adesão de membros do *Grupo Ruptura* e do *Grupo Frente*. Os artistas concretistas estavam voltados para as teorias da *Escola de Ulm* e propunham uma arte voltada para o racionalismo matemático, uma arte antinaturalista e geométrica, industrial. Propunham uma arte a que todas as pessoas pudessem ter acesso. Em 1956, quatro artistas brasileiros: Almir Mavignir, Mary Viera, Geraldo de Barros e Alexandre Wollner estudaram na Hochschule de Ulm, sob a direção de Maldonado.

Segundo Zanini, o contexto de desenvolvimento do concretismo no Brasil era o seguinte: “A penetração no Brasil do ideário plástico que se enraíza no Construtivismo russo, no Neoplasticismo holandês e nos princípios propostos pela *Bauhaus*, revistos pelo conceito de visão harmônica e universal de Max Bill, ligava-se ao quadro geral de novos fatores sócio-

²⁴ PEDROSA, Mário. *Grupo Frente*. In: (Org.) FUNARTE. *Abstracionismo Geométrico e Informal*. FUNARTE, Rio de Janeiro, 1987, 231.

²⁵ Entrevista com Aluísio Carvão. In: (Org.) FUNARTE. *Abstracionismo Geométrico e informal*. FUNARTE, Rio de Janeiro, 1987, 141.

econômicos intervenientes na realidade brasileira. Era aquele um período de vivência democrática e otimismo econômico, do novo surto industrial de São Paulo, do empreendimento de Brasília”.²⁶

A existência de diferenças entre concretistas “paulistas” e “cariocas” começa a se tornar visível numa exposição de 1957, na qual os “paulistas” usavam um rigor racionalista em suas obras enquanto os cariocas faziam um uso expressivo das cores: “A nossa idéia era que o pessoal do Rio, a partir da visão do Ivan Serpa, tinha uma visão muito mais abstrata: a escolha aleatória de cores etc. Para nós a cor tinha que ser determinada não tinha essa coisa de colorido, esse subjetivismo”.²⁷ Mas as diferenças não foram apenas estas - a crítica tratou bastante das divergências entre Rio de Janeiro e São Paulo: o Rio era “mais cor”, “calor”, São Paulo “mais formal”, menos “cor”. Mas as diferenças entre os dois grupos eram ainda mais profundas: Esta diferença é mais profunda do que pode parecer à primeira vista. Trata-se, com efeito, não apenas de modos diferentes de realizar a obra de arte, como também de conceber a obra de arte e suas relações”.²⁸ As diferenças entre os “cariocas” e os “paulistas” se desenvolveram a partir do modo como cada um deles recebeu a arte concreta internacional. Segundo Mário Pedrosa: “Os artistas cariocas estão longe dessa severa consciência concretista de seus colegas paulistas. (...) enquanto amam sobretudo a tela, que lhes fica como último contato físico-sensorial com a matéria, e através desta, de algum modo com a natureza, os paulistas amam sobretudo a idéia”²⁹.

Haroldo de Campos lançou o manifesto *Da Fenomenologia da Composição À Matemática da Composição*. Este tratava da poesia concreta que “caminha pra a rejeição da estrutura orgânica em prol de uma estrutura matemática ou quase-matemática”. Mais adiante “a passagem da fenomenologia da composição à matemática da composição coincide com uma outra passagem: a do orgânico-fisiognômico para o geométrico-isomórfico”.³⁰

Os “cariocas” não concordaram com esta proposta e Ferreira Gullar lançou, então, o *Manifesto Neoconcreto*, no qual discordava dos “paulistas”, do racionalismo e dos postulados da escola de ULM.³¹

²⁶ ZANINI, Walter. *História geral da arte no Brasil: Transformações do meio ambiente*. São Paulo, 2v of Instituto Walther Moreira Salles, 1983, 653.

²⁷ PIGNATARI, Décio. Entrevista com Décio Pignatari. IN: (Org.) FUNARTE. *Abstracionismo Geométrico e informal*. FUNARTE, Rio de Janeiro, 1987, 73.

²⁸ CORDEIRO, Waldemar. Ruptura. IN: (Org.) FUNARTE. *Abstracionismo Geométrico e informal*. FUNARTE, Rio de Janeiro, 1987, 225.

²⁹ PEDROSA, Mário. Paulistas e cariocas. In: AMARAL, Aracy. *Projeto construtivo brasileiro na Arte (1950-1962)*. FUNARTE, SP, 1977.

³⁰ CAMPOS, Haroldo. “Da fenomenologia da composição à matemática da composição”. In: (Org.) FUNARTE. *Abstracionismo geométrico e informal*. FUNARTE, Rio de Janeiro, 1987, 227.

³¹ “A expressão ‘neoconcreto’ indica uma tomada de posição em face da arte não figurativa geométrica (neoplasticismo, construtivismo, suprematismo, escola de Ulm) e, particularmente, em face da arte neoconcreta

Segundo Cordeiro, no movimento concreto havia outras dissidências “é, pois, evidente que os opostos devem ser procurados no próprio setor de vanguarda”.³² No caso do grupo carioca, este, ao discordar da proposta de Haroldo de Campos, em 1959, lança o movimento neoconcreto. Na realidade, a diferença entre a produção paulista e a carioca já existia antes da primeira exposição de arte concreta (1956-1957).

Lygia Clark se aproxima do concretismo paulista ao participar, em 1958, de uma exposição na *Galeria de Artes das Folhas*, ao lado de Charoux e Weissmann. Esta proximidade também pode ser notada através das esculturas de alumínio de Luís Sacilotto, que antecipavam a leveza dos *Bichos* de Clark - as esculturas de Sacilotto não possuíam dobradiças,³³ mais tarde inseridas por Clark em seus *Bichos*. Sendo assim, Lygia Clark era vista, pelos concretistas paulistas, como a artista carioca mais próxima deles. Mas, segundo a própria Lygia Clark, ela estava, na verdade, distante da obra deles, pois já trabalhava com uma linha mais orgânica. Esta diferença também foi percebida na obra de outros artistas: “Se você vê os quadros de Ivan na época você percebe que há a busca de um rigor construtivo, mas ao mesmo tempo há uma valorização do elemento cromático, quer dizer, da cor. Há uma certa sensualidade, e no caso do Ivan, a busca de um elemento poético, a busca de um certo fascínio de pintar sensualmente, fazer uma coisa bonita”.³⁴

O rompimento dos concretistas “cariocas” com os paulistas foi geral: Gullar e Oiticica já expunham suas diferenças antes do *Manifesto Neoconcreto*: “O Gullar já fazia uma coisa muito diferente e o Hélio Oiticica, que tinha 18 anos, e até hoje tem trabalhos notáveis daquela época, usava uma linha, não igual à minha, porque a minha inclusive era uma linha cavada. O Hélio começou a usar também um outro tipo de formulação da superfície, com o espaço completamente aberto e diferente do grupo de São Paulo”.³⁵

As diferenças existiam desde a formação do *Concretismo*. Entre estas, estão as sociais. Os artistas do *Grupo Ruptura* não tinham uma formação universitária, ao contrário dos artistas do Rio. São Paulo era uma cidade industrial onde as influências de Bill foram rapidamente absorvidas, enquanto que o Rio tinha uma pesquisa mais voltada para o social, com menos rigor formal e uma busca do espaço, o extra-espaço da moldura.

VI

levada a uma perigosa exacerbação racionalista”. GULLAR, Ferreira. *Manifesto Neoconcreto*. In: (Org.) AMARAL, Aracy. *Projeto Construtivo Brasileiro na Arte*. FUNARTE, Rio de Janeiro, 1977, 270.

³² CORDEIRO, Waldemar. *Ruptura*. In: (Org.) FUNARTE. *Abstracionismo geométrico e informal*. FUNARTE, Rio de Janeiro, 1987, 225.

³³ como por exemplo, *Concreção 5730*, 1957.

³⁴GULLAR, Ferreira. Entrevista com Ferreira Gullar. In: (Org.) FUNARTE. *Abstracionismo geométrico e informal*. FUNARTE, Rio de Janeiro, 1987, 93.

³⁵CLARK, Lygia. Entrevista com Lygia Clark. In: (Org.) FUNARTE. *Abstracionismo geométrico e informal*. FUNARTE, Rio de Janeiro, 1987, 147.

Neoconcretismo

Pode-se dizer que o *neoconcretismo* se inicia em 1959, com a *I Exposição Nacional de Arte Neoconcreta*, a partir da qual foi publicado o *Manifesto Neoconcreto* de Ferreira Gullar. *Os participantes do Manifesto Neoconcreto de 1959* (Lygia Clark, Franz Weissmann, Lygia Pape, Willys de Castro, Abraham Palatnik, Ferreira Gullar, Ivan Serpa, Amílcar de Castro, Reynaldo Jardim e Theon Spanúdis. Depois o movimento contou com a adesão de Hélio Oiticica, Roberto Pontual, Décio Viera, Osmar Dillon, Cláudio Melo e Souza e Carlos Fernando Fortes de Almeida.) *eram os integrantes do concretismo carioca que não concordavam com as teorias concretistas paulistas de uma arte mais racionalista, voltada para a ciência. Havia, além disso, outras divergências*³⁶. *Os cariocas se agruparam em torno de Gullar, o qual denominou o grupo de Neoconcretismo*³⁷, já que os artistas cariocas não estariam mais fazendo arte concreta. O movimento não ficou restrito apenas aos artistas do Rio: também contou com a participação de Willy de Castro e Hércules Barsotti, artistas paulistas que divergiram de Waldemar Cordeiro.

O *Manifesto Neoconcreto* se inicia com a afirmação de que “A expressão neoconcreto indica uma tomada de posição em face da arte não-figurativa, geométrica (neoplasticismo, construtivismo, suprematismo, escola de ULM) e particularmente em face da arte concreta levada a uma perigosa exacerbação racionalista.” A arte neoconcreta, por esta via, não propõe uma rejeição dos postulados concretistas, mas um aprofundamento das experiências implícitas nestes.³⁸ Os artistas integrantes do *neoconcretismo* presentes na *Primeira Exposição Neoconcreta* foram Lygia Clark, Franz Weissmann, Lygia Pape, Willys de Castro, Abraham Palatnik, Ferreira Gullar, Ivan Serpa, Amílcar de Castro, Reynaldo Jardim e Theon Spanúdis. Depois o movimento contou com a adesão de Hélio Oiticica, Roberto Pontual, Décio Viera, Osmar Dillon, Cláudio Melo e Souza e Carlos Fernando Fortes de Almeida.

Conclusão

A desintegração do grupo Concreto e a criação do Grupo Neoconcreto demarcaram o fim da Arte Concreta no Brasil e o surgimento de outras correntes artísticas,

³⁶ “O *Neoconcretismo* fez um retorno ao humanismo frente ao cientificismo concreto”. BRITO, Ronaldo. *As Ideologias Construtivas no Ambiente Cultural Brasileiro*. In: (Org.) AMARAL, Aracy. *Projeto Construtivo na Arte*. FUNARTE, Rio de Janeiro, 1997, 304.

³⁷ “Encarregado de escrever a apresentação da mostra, passei a refletir sobre o que havia ocorrido naqueles dois últimos anos e vi que não teria cabimento nos apresentarmos como artistas concretos. ‘O que estamos fazendo, tanto no campo das artes plásticas como no da poesia, é tão diferente do que se chama de arte concreta, que está a exigir outro nome. Sugiro que se chame arte neoconcreta’”. GULLAR, Ferreira. *O Grupo Frente e a Reação Neoconcreta*. In: Org. AMARAL, Aracy. *Arte construtiva no Brasil - Coleção Adolpho Leirner*, 158.

³⁸ GULLAR, Ferreira. *Etapas da arte contemporânea*. Ed. Nobel, São Paulo, 250.

como o Popcreto, Grupo Rex. Em 1960, os ex-integrantes do Concretismo se reuniram novamente e participaram da exposição de Arte “Konkrete Kunst” (Arte Concreta), organizada por Max Bill em Zurique. Os artistas que participaram foram: Lygia Clark, Almir Mavignier, Oiticica, Hércules Barsotti, Maurício Nogueira Lima, Waldemar Cordeiro, Geraldo de Barros, Luiz Sacilloto, Décio Viera, e outros.

Tatiane de Oliveira Elias

Narrative CV

Tatiane de Oliveira Elias is an Art History PhD candidate at Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design, in the Art Science Department. She is currently in her second year of study. Her research examines the work of the Brazilian Avant-garde artist Hélio Oiticica focusing on his films. In 2003 she received her M.A in Art History from UNICAMP University with magna cum laude, in 1999 she graduated in Philosophy at UNICAMP. She wrote her Bachelor Diploma about Hélio Oiticica and Matisse under the advisor Prof. Aguilar. Her specialist field is Art, theory and criticism of late modernism with a historical focus on the 1960s and 1970s, particularly Brazil. In 2003 she was Tutor at the lecture Contemporary Art and Films at IFCH/ UNICAMP under the supervision by Prof. Aguilar. In 2002 she went to Germany to research into the Concrete Art. She has received grants from different Fellowships CAPES/DAAD, FAPESP, FAEP, SAE. She attended different conferences and Symposiums about the history of Art. She has written articles on Hélio Oiticica, Saint Clair Cemin, Tarsila do Amaral and Géricault. She having lived and studied abroad at Venice International University, *Aberystwyth University*, Munich University, Freiburg University and Paris. She also attended Class with Professors from Boston College and Duke University. She has travelled to do research in New York, Berlin, Weimar, Vienna, Bern and Zurich. Portuguese is her mother tongue; she speaks German, English, Italian and French.

Creating History: The Definition of the Avant-Garde at the Second São Paulo Bienal

Adele Nelson

In a 1955 text for the first edition of his new magazine, *Módulo: Revista de arquitetura e artes plásticas*, Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer denounced the “clamorous mutilation” of his design for a complex of buildings in São Paulo’s Ibirapuera Park at the hands of the project’s patron, the Comissão do IV Centenário de São Paulo (Commission of the Fourth Centenary of São Paulo).¹ The plan consisted of a network of concrete and glass rectilinear pavilions dedicated to industries, nations, and states, connected by a central walkway, or marquise (fig. 1). The domed Pavilion of the Arts and wedge-shaped auditorium also linked to the marquise and were separated by an entrance platform and narrow walkway. The Pavilion of Agriculture and lakeside restaurant inhabited the perimeter of the site (seen in lower left and center top of fig. 1).² Several elements of this approved plan were not realized. The auditorium, restaurant, and entrance platform were not built, and the design of several structures and the marquise was altered. Written shortly after the closure of the fourth centennial celebrations of 1954, Niemeyer’s critique in *Módulo* contained the architect’s proposal for how to reinstate and preserve his original design.

In addition to his insistence on constructing the yet unrealized auditorium,³ his other key concern was several design changes that he argued obfuscated his objective “...to give the complex a panoramic amplitude and lightness that can only be attained by open spaces – between and in the constructions.” Niemeyer viewed the marquise that connects the five central buildings as essential to achieving this openness. He dismissed

as nonsense the discussion of enclosing the walkway in some manner and decried the centennial commission's decision to construct clumsy temporary stands underneath it.⁴ In the photographic spread dedicated to the marquise in his essay (fig. 2), Niemeyer juxtaposed two large images shot from the vantage point of a visitor standing in the marquise taking in broad panoramas of earth, building, and sky framed by the parallel sinuous lines of the concrete canopy, above, and the concrete walkway, below.⁵ He also disapproved of his patron's decision to enclose the ground floors of several pavilions with glass walls so as to transform them into usable spaces for exhibition. Without this obstruction, a visitor would have moved, unfettered, from the shaded, open space in the marquise to an expansive, open-air colonnade.⁶

As Niemeyer's postmortem on the Ibirapuera Park project makes clear, he sought to create expansive panoramic views and dramatic, yet seamless transitions between distinct spaces. Though the interiors are virtually unmentioned in *Módulo*, these qualities were manifested there as well, particularly in the form of the broad, central ramps that carve through the interior volumes of each building (fig. 3). In this paper, I study the preeminent and inaugural event of the fourth centenary, the second Bienal de São Paulo, and examine the composition and display of the works of art assembled in Niemeyer's open, sliding space. I will analyze the remarkable exhibitions dedicated to the European avant-garde at this Bienal in relationship both to comparable presentations at other international events, in particular the postwar Venice Biennales, and to the concurrent display of geometric abstract art by young artists of the Americas at the Bienal. As I will demonstrate, the second Bienal created an account of the vanguard artistic past and present that would prove transformative for young local artists.

The Making of Modern Art History

Inaugurated in 1951 and organized by the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM-SP), following the model of the Venice Biennale, the Bienal was conceived as an art exhibition intended to boost the national art scene and demonstrate Brazil's—and above all São Paulo's—high level of economic and cultural development. In his foreword to the catalogue that accompanied the first Bienal, artistic director Lourival Gomes Machado wrote, “By its own definition, the Bienal should fulfill two major tasks: place Brazil's modern art not merely in confrontation with, but in living contact with the art of the rest of the world, while simultaneously seeking a position for São Paulo as an international artistic center.”⁷ With the second Bienal, held from December 1953 to February 1954 in the adjacent and nearly identical Pavilions of Nations and States (seen in upper right of fig. 1), the leadership of the MAM-SP achieved the type of ambitious international event they had sought since the museum's founding in 1948. This Bienal was above all an enviable temporary museum of modern art, with extensive special exhibitions dedicated to Cubism, Expressionism, Futurism, and de Stijl, as well as to Alexander Calder, Paul Klee, Henry Moore, and Pablo Picasso. Among the masterpieces included were Umberto Boccioni's *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913), Klee's *Death and Fire* (1940), Picasso's *Still Life with Chair Caning* (1912) and *Guernica* (1937), and Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1942–43), as well as James Ensor's *Self Portrait with Masks* (1899) and Edvard Munch's *Evening on Karl Johan Street* (1892).⁸ The most comprehensive display of the history of modernism ever realized in South America, it

rivalled and, according to some commentators, surpassed the collections and special exhibition programs of the world's premier museums.⁹

In augmenting the national representations from thirty-two countries with a choreographed presentation of key figures and movements in the history of early twentieth century European art,¹⁰ Bienal organizers adopted a practice already underway at the postwar Venice Biennales, and one that would soon be undertaken at the first Documenta exhibition in 1955.¹¹ As art historians Lawrence Alloway and Hans Belting have argued in relationship to the inclusion of modern art in Venice and Kassel, these exhibitions, including the Bienal, represent some of the earliest systemic, large-scale presentations of art of the prewar past and contribute to the nascent consideration of a narrative of modern art using the methods and approaches of art history.¹² The modern movements and artists featured in Kassel, São Paulo, and Venice differed little, each recounting a now familiar litany of “isms” and major innovators, with the notable exclusion of the most overtly politicized movements, namely Dada and Russian Constructivism.¹³ In several instances, the depth and quality of the selection shown at the second Bienal exceeded those assembled in Venice, particularly the Klee and Picasso retrospectives and de Stijl exhibition organized, respectively, by respected international curators and critics Ludwig Grote, Maurice Jardot, and Willem Sandberg.¹⁴

The influential art critic Mário Pedrosa played a significant role in shaping the substance and caliber of the special exhibitions at the Bienal. In the capacity of an official representative of the centennial commission, Pedrosa traveled to countries throughout Europe in the spring and summer of 1953 to secure their participation, persuade them to mount an exhibition concomitant with the Bienal's interest, and, in some cases, assist in

the selection of works to be sent to São Paulo.¹⁵ For example, Pedrosa worked tirelessly to obtain a robust exhibition of work by Klee, an artist he considered “the master most beloved and followed by the younger generations of the entire world.”¹⁶ He promised Klee’s heirs a face-off between their father’s work and that of Picasso’s in which Klee’s singular contribution to the history of modern art would be evident. To persuade German authorities, Pedrosa argued their support of a Klee exhibition would be considered a reparation for the Nazi closure of the Bauhaus. Eventually, Pedrosa was able to bring to the Bienal a retrospective composed of sixty-five paintings accompanied by a well illustrated, Portuguese-language exhibition catalogue, making scholarship on the artist available to a Brazilian audience.¹⁷

Moreover, São Paulo’s, and Brazil’s, distinct historical and geographic position contributed to the creation of a markedly unique portrayal of modern art history. In their historical exhibitions, the Italian and German institutions were reflecting on their own national artistic accomplishments and those of geographic neighbors in the context of postwar restitution.¹⁸ The Bienal organizers, on the other hand, were staking claim to a largely European history of modern art on behalf of Brazilian artists in a moment of boisterous optimism for the country’s economic and political future. This developmentalist spirit pervaded the modernist Ibirapuera Park design in a coordinated effort by the patron and architect to portray São Paulo as a cosmopolitan, advanced global metropolis untethered to parochial concerns.¹⁹

Compromised though it may have been in the eyes of its creator, Niemeyer’s design made possible a flexible narrative of modern art history impossible in the buildings of the Venice Biennale. The plans of the Central Pavilion and Giardini

(Gardens) at the twenty-fifth Venice Biennale in 1950 (figs. 4 & 5) created a marked contrast to those of the ground floors of the Pavilions of Nations and States at the second Bienal (figs. 6 & 7).²⁰ In Venice, the Central Pavilion consisted of a rabbit's warren of immutable and disparately sized and shaped rooms, and the Giardini resembled nothing so much as the grounds of a world's fair where each national representation was presented in its own building in the midst of a formal garden. Here the architectural setting encouraged visitors to distinguish between national artistic expressions as they traversed each threshold or portion of the garden. In São Paulo, Niemeyer relegated the few permanent walls to the perimeter of each two-story building and thereby produced enormous, largely uniform halls to be subdivided with temporary walls and ascended via the large ramp. Bienal organizers used this open plan to facilitate in-depth looking and connections across national and historical boundaries by creating spaces where one could be surrounded by works from one artist, style, or nation at one moment (**fig. 8**), and in the next confront vistas that cut across nations and history. Unlike the chronological, frequently progressive developmental portrayal of modern art history available on the printed pages of the small volumes and journals that began to proliferate in Brazil in the early 1950s,²¹ the Bienal offered visitors a circuitous and often cross-cultural and transhistorical experience of the actual works of art. One could compare bronze monumental sculpture created in the early 1950s by Italian artist Marino Marini and British artist Henry Moore (fig. 3), and glance from Picasso's canvases of the 1920s and 30s up to paintings and sculptures of the 1940s and 50s by French artist Henri-Georges Adam (fig. 9).

Spatial Geopolitics at the Second Bienal

While the interior open plan of Niemeyer's buildings enabled fluid transitions between works of art from different artists, historical moments, and nations, the Bienal organizers partitioned the exhibition into the two buildings in a manner that underscored national and regional identity. The works of art sent to the Bienal by each nation were divided along geographic lines: the Pavilion of Nations included European countries along with a few Middle Eastern and Asian nations, and the Pavilion of States included Brazil and countries of the Americas, as well as the architecture section. Borrowing the terms used by the recently chartered United Nations and Organization of American States, Bienal organizers adopted "states" and "nations" to distinguish between the countries of the Americas and those of the rest of world.

The largest amount of space was given to four countries: Brazil, the United States, France, and Italy, with the first two occupying the entire ground floor of the Pavilion of States, and the latter two filling the ground floor of the Pavilion of Nations. These choices reflected historical, societal, and political conditions as well as the importance the Bienal organizers placed on the artistic achievements of these nations. It was France that had founded the academy in Brazil, and its art had remained at the forefront of the national scene throughout the first half of the twentieth century.²² Cultural exchange with Italy, on the other hand, was a more recent phenomenon, spearheaded by the increasingly well-to-do and influential Italian-Brazilian community in São Paulo and by perhaps its most prominent member, Francisco "Ciccillo" Matarazzo Sobrinho, the founder of MAM-SP and the Bienal and the president of the centennial commission. Meanwhile, the United States, via Nelson Rockefeller and the Museum of Modern Art, New York, had

been directly involved in shaping Brazil's modern art institutions and was viewed by Matarazzo as an important strategic partner in his ambitious goal to transform São Paulo into a world-class artistic center.²³

The division of the exhibitions of Europe and the Americas, as well as the content of the displays, resulted in the European contribution being understood by Brazilian critics above all as historical, while the works from the Americas were seen as embodying current and future trends. The principal European exhibitions were dominated by displays dedicated to works by the key figures of the historical avant-garde. Given the quality of these works and the remarkable nature of their presence in a developing nation, they attracted the lion's share of critical and popular attention, none more so than Picasso's *Guernica* (fig. 10).²⁴ In turn, a number of displays from the Americas presented works by contemporary practitioners of various geometric abstract styles. For example, the Argentine exhibition (fig. 11) displayed a concentration of works by Concrete and Madí artists,²⁵ and the Uruguayan display included new non-figurative art alongside the work of Joaquín Torres-García and his followers.²⁶ Similarly, geometric abstract works were prominent in the Cuban and Venezuelan exhibitions.²⁷ The Brazilian section was sprawling, with some four hundred works, including a large and motley assortment of figurative paintings. A significant number of painters practicing abstract tendencies also participated, and the installation practice of grouping stylistically similar works created notable concentrations of lyrical and geometric abstractions. Concrete works by members of São Paulo's Grupo Ruptura hung alongside geometric abstract paintings by French-born artist Samson Flexor and members of his São Paulo-based Atelier Abstração and by artists who would soon form Rio de Janeiro's Grupo Frente.²⁸

The exhibitions that filled the sunken atriums of the two buildings underscored this geographically defined distinction between the past and present. In the Pavilion of States, René D'Harnoncourt, director of the Museum of Modern Art, installed a large Calder show composed of forty-five sculptures, including newer large-scale mobiles as well as earlier carved-wood sculptures and motorized contraptions (fig. 12). Like the Picasso exhibition of fifty-two paintings installed by Jardot in the atrium of the adjacent Pavilion of Nations, the display provided a retrospective overview of Calder's career to date and was installed in a manner that gave prominence to specific works. The Picasso installation unfolded chronologically along the curved wall of the atrium and culminated with *Guernica*—an enormous oil-on-canvas painting over twenty-five feet long and eleven feet tall—hung at the base of the ramp on the only orthogonal wall in the atrium. Similarly, D'Harnoncourt suspended no less than six large Calder mobiles from the double-height ceiling, distributing them throughout the entire atrium (fig. 13).²⁹ To viewers at the Bienal, Picasso's *Guernica* and Calder's mobiles seemed to represent fundamentally different worlds, one the sober reminder of the tragedy of war-torn Europe and the other, a forward-looking vision seemingly emancipated from history. As one observer recalled, "I saw them [Calder's mobiles] for the first time about ten years ago, at the Ministério da Educação e Cultura, and then later at the Bienal in Ibirapuera Park in celebration of the fourth centenary of the founding of the city of São Paulo . . . Nearby—or next door, I don't remember exactly—was the Picasso retrospective. Over several days my eyes were alternately attracted and fascinated by two contrasting visions: the tragedy and neutral colors of *Guernica*, and the *feita* and tremendous *joie de vivre* of the mobiles."³⁰

The contemporary and abstract character of the majority of the works displayed in the Pavilion of States was not, in fact, consistent with the original aims of the Bienal organizers. Though little discussed at the time by the art press and unexamined by historians since, the special exhibitions in the Brazilian section were dedicated to Brazilian Impressionist painter Eliseu Visconti (1866–1944) and portrayals of the Brazilian landscape from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.³¹ That Bienal organizers also envisioned a special exhibition dedicated to a late nineteenth century US realist or tonalist painter, namely Winslow Homer or Albert Ryder – a suggestion the Museum of Modern Art declined, selecting Calder instead – indicates that the Brazilian special displays were part of a concerted effort to delineate a slightly earlier historical and seemingly more traditional stylistic framework for the consideration of modern art in the Americas.³² At first blush exhibitions dedicated to Visconti and landscape paintings seem incongruous with the special exhibitions of the historical avant-garde. Why, for example, were key figures of Brazilian modernism, such as Emiliano Di Cavalcanti and Cândido Portinari, not invited to participate in a special exhibition, as they had been at the first Bienal? The change in course, in part, resulted from the resoundingly negative response to the prize policy at the first Bienal, wherein invited artists were not eligible for prizes. The artists and a vocal portion of the art press viewed this as an attempt to marginalize figurative art in favor of abstraction.³³ And while the artists included in special exhibitions at the second Bienal, with the exception of the *hors concours* Picasso retrospective, were eligible for prizes, the prior dust-up made a display dedicated to Brazilian modernist artists untenable.³⁴

This exclusion of the modernists may have facilitated Pedrosa's own interest in an exhibition of Visconti's work.³⁵ In a 1950 article discussing the 1949 exhibition of the artist at the Museu Nacional de Belas Artes in Rio, Pedrosa praised Visconti's painterly skill, formal experimentation, and sensitivity to the local landscape. He commended the artist's break with academicism and held his work as a model for future painting in Brazil.³⁶ Pedrosa was not alone in his enthusiasm for Visconti's work. Many of his peers, including critics devoted to abstraction, to figuration, and to the promotion of national patrimony, saw him as an original, independent innovator who never abandoned his critical outlook toward his own production or new trends. The catalogue for the Bienal special exhibition (fig. 14) variously identified Visconti as the initiator of Brazilian modern art, as a legitimate practitioner of a foundational modernist style, Impressionism, and as a precursor and example for young Brazilian artists.³⁷ The choice of Visconti demonstrated a desire to present an artist committed in equal measures to mastering then current artistic languages and to creating work embedded in the local culture and environment. In the figure of Visconti, critics like Pedrosa found a local practitioner of an international style who could in turn provide a model of originality, independence, and criticality for a younger generation of Brazilian artists. In short, Visconti was a precursor of just the sort of transformation organizers of the second Bienal hoped to bring about for a new generation of artists in Brazil.

Going Forward

Several months after the closure of the second Bienal, a new artistic group of young Rio-based artists staged its first exhibition in June of 1954 (fig. 15).³⁸ The group was led by

artist, teacher, and prizewinner at the first two Bienais, Ivan Serpa, critic and poet, Ferreira Gullar, and Pedrosa, and included several artists who would go on to revolutionize the Brazilian art scene, namely Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, and Lygia Pape. In addition to having exhibited works at the second Bienal, Grupo Frente artists were considered by the Bienal organizers to be the event's prime audience along with young artists of São Paulo and of the rest of Brazil. The formation of the group in the wake of the second Bienal thereby provided an early and significant case in which to consider the impact that the narrative of modern art history presented in Niemeyer's modernist buildings had on young artists.

Grupo Frente initially consisted of eight artists: Aluísio Carvão, Clark, Vincent Ibberson, Pape, Serpa, João José da Silva Costa, Carlos Val, and Décio Vieira. It expanded to encompass fifteen and included a number of Serpa's students from his painting courses at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM-RJ), such as Oiticica. Though the majority of the Grupo Frente artists practiced geometric abstraction, the production of the participating artists was heterogeneous, ranging from hard-edged, painterly, and kinetic geometric abstract works of all media to primitivist and expressionist paintings and works on paper. Given this diversity, the experience of a Grupo Frente exhibition was comparable to the cross-cultural and transhistorical vistas enabled by Niemeyer's design at the second Bienal. Like Niemeyer, Grupo Frente also considered openness paramount. According to Pedrosa, the notions of receptivity and "the freedom of creation" defined the group's identity.³⁹ In his essay for the group's second exhibition at the MAM-RJ in July of 1955, Pedrosa made clear that Grupo Frente did not seek any sort of programmatic group cohesion. "[T]he group is open... for the

future, for the generations in formation. More promising still is the fact that the group is not a closed clique, or even less an academy where one teaches and learns little rules and recipes to make abstractionism, Concretism, Expressionism, Futurism, Cubism, realisms or neo-realisms and other ‘isms.’”⁴⁰ In an interview published a few days after the show at MAM-RJ opened, Serpa deemed the tendency toward abstraction in the group as “merely accidental.”⁴¹

This dismissal of style as a means of group definition was a rejection of the prevailing model of the historical and postwar avant-garde showcased at the Bienal. There, despite the flexibility of Niemeyer’s interior spaces, nation and style persisted as the definitive categories. The exhibition was sliced up into national representations and stylistically defined special exhibitions and placed in buildings organized into geopolitical blocs. Given the alteration of Niemeyer’s design, we can only wonder if the removal of the glass walls on the ground floor of each building and the clearing of obstructions from under the marquee would have been created a matrix of sufficient openness to counter biennial exhibitions’ common tendency to assimilate differences into easily understood categories, such as nation or style, in order to create a comprehensive narrative of the art displayed.⁴² Grupo Frente members and leaders were engrossed in the ideas and works of the historical avant-garde – an engagement that was profoundly enriched by the historical displays at the second Bienal – and interested in the experimentation and societal transformation intrinsic to a vanguard project. But they were also skeptical: skeptical of the easy conflation of a given formal language with genuine innovation that they witnessed in the reception of exhibitions like the Bienal among young artists in Brazil and Latin America as a whole.

The very name the group adopted called a spade a spade. Instead of an illusion to a formal style or the by-then catch phrases for a vanguard position, such as renovation, invention, or rupture,⁴³ Grupo Frente replaced French military terminology, avant-garde, with a plain, non-specialized single-word expression of their perceived and desired position: Front. In so doing, Grupo Frente simultaneously laid claim to all of modern art history and expressed their critical outlook toward any attempt to temper or to superficially survey that history. This young artistic group thereby fulfilled the promise of the Bienal project to create substantial, “living contact” with the international artistic scene on behalf of local artists. It is from this dual platform of deep engagement with and non-subservience to the historical avant-garde that members of Grupo Frente, principal among them Clark, Oiticica, and Pape, would go on in the late 1950s and early 1960s to forge a new, wholly original postwar vanguard.

¹ “Conjunto do Ibirapuera,” *Módulo* 1, no. 1 (March 1955), 18–31. On the history of the Ibirapuera Park and the centennial commission, see Manuela Mariana Andrade, “O Parque do Ibirapuera: 1890 a 1954,” *Arquitextos* 051 (August 2004), http://www.vitruvius.com.br/arquitextos/arq051/arq051_01.asp; Andrade, “O processo de formação do Parque do Ibirapuera,” *Revista do Arquivo Histórico Municipal de São Paulo* 204 (2006), 49–65; Paulo César Garcez Marins, “O Parque do Ibirapuera e a construção da identidade paulista,” *Anais do Museu Paulista: História e cultura material* 6/7, no. 7 (1998–99), 9–36; Fabiano Lemes de Oliveira, “Modelos urbanísticos modernos e parques urbanos: As relações urbanismo e paisagismo em São Paulo na primeira metade do século” (PhD dissertation, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, 2008), pp. 385–410.

² It is noteworthy that Pavilion of Agriculture, visible in the lower left corner of fig. 1, was envisioned as a separate pillar of the Brazilian economy, disentangled from international collaboration. Agriculture had traditionally accounted for most of Brazil’s economic growth, but by mid-century, industrial production was on the rise. On the Ibirapuera Park design, see Stamo Padapaki, *Oscar Niemeyer: Works in Progress* (New York: Reinhold, 1956), 124–53; Henrique E. Mindlin, *Arquitetura moderna no Brasil*, rev. ed. (New York: Reinhold, 1956; Rio de Janeiro: Aeroplano Editora, 1999), 206–14; Cecília Scharlach, ed., *Oscar Niemeyer: A marquise e o projeto original do Parque Ibirapuera* (São Paulo: Imprensa Oficial, 2006). On the postwar economic and political history of Brazil, see Boris Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 233–53; Thomas Skidmore, *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 127–44.

³ The auditorium was not built until 2005, leaving the project incomplete for half a century. See Scharlach, *Oscar Niemeyer*, 106–9.

⁴ “Conjunto do Ibirapuera,” 20. Unless otherwise noted, translations are by the author.

⁵ “Conjunto do Ibirapuera,” 22–23.

⁶ Ibid., 20.

⁷ Lourival Gomes Machado, “Introdução,” in *I Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo: Catálogo*, 2nd ed. (São Paulo: MAM-SP, 1951), 14, trans. in Ivo Mesquita and Ana Paula Cohen, “Introduction,” in *28a Bienal de São Paulo “Em vivo contato”: Guia* (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 2008), 16, with minor modification by the author.

⁸ The Bienal catalogue and page numbers for these works, and the collections where the works are currently found, are as follows: Boccioni, cat. 40, p. 220, Galleria d’Arte Moderna, Milan; Klee, cat. 64, p. 62, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern; Picasso, *Still Life with Chair Caning*, cat. 3, p. 178, Musée Picasso, Paris; Picasso, *Guernica*, cat. 35, p. 179, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; Mondrian, cat. 20, p. 193, The Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA); Ensor, cat. 16, p. 84, Menard Art Museum, Komaki City, Japan; Munch, cat. 18, p. 261, Bergen Art Museum, Norway. Mari Carmen Ramírez has identified *Victory Boogie Woogie*, 1942–44, as the work described as *Composição “Boogi-Woogi”* (1942–43) in the Bienal catalogue, but MoMA’s records and installation views (fig. 8) confirm that the museum loaned *Broadway Boogie Woogie* to the second Bienal; see Registrar Outgoing Loan Records, Outgoing Loan Book (1951–54), MoMA Registrar Archival Files, New York; Arquivo de Imagens, 2 Bienal, box Obras / Salas / Prédio / Personalidades / Público, file Público / Obras, Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo (AHWS); *II Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo: Catálogo geral* (São Paulo: Edições Americanas de Arte e Arquitetura, 1953), 193; Mari Carmen Ramírez, “The Embodiment of Color—‘From the Inside Out,’” in *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Color*, ed. Ramírez (London: Tate, 2007), 39. I am grateful to Jennifer Schauer in the Department of Collection Management and Exhibition Registration at MoMA for generously locating the documentation of the Mondrian loan.

⁹ Antônio Bento, “No vernissage do II Bienal de S. Paulo,” *Diário carioca*, December 9, 1953, 6; Jayme Maurício, “O ‘vernissage’ da II Bienal de São Paulo,” *Correio da manhã*, December 10, 1953, sec. 1, 12; idem, “A magnífica participação da Holanda na II Bienal,” *Correio da manhã*, December 15, 1953, sec. 1, 12; idem, “A entrevista falhada com Henry Moore,” *Correio da manhã*, December 16, 1953, sec. 1, 11; Mário Pedrosa, “A Bienal de cá para lá,” 1970, in Pedrosa, *Textos escolhidos*, vol. 1, *Política das artes*, ed. Otilia Arantes (São Paulo: Edusp, 1995), 271.

¹⁰ The Bienal organizers played a large role in shaping the subjects of the various special exhibitions. An artist and art movement was suggested sent to each nation invited to organize a special exhibition in correspondence in late 1952. These letters were then followed by additional correspondence and in-person visits from representatives or allies of the Bienal and centennial commission including Paulo Almeida de Mendes, Paulo Carneiro, Cícero Dias, Maria Martins, Mário Pedrosa, and Yolanda Penteadó in the spring and summer of 1953; see Documentos Históricos, II Bienal, boxes 1–4, 6, 25–26, 34, AHWS; Acervo Mário Pedrosa, box 3, file 5, Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro (BN).

¹¹ Discussions of resuming the Venice Biennale after the war’s conclusion began in 1946 and the first postwar exhibition was realized in 1948. As Secretary General from 1948–56, Italian art historian Rodolfo Pallucchini organized a series of exhibitions focused on the history of modern art. Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale, 1895–1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (Greenwich, CT.: New York Graphic Society, 1968), 133–36. On the postwar Venice Biennales, also see Nancy Jachec, *Politics and Paintings at the Venice Biennale, 1948–64: Italy and the Idea of Europe* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2007).

¹² Alloway, *The Venice Biennale*, 135; Hans Belting, *Art History After Modernism* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 37–43. As Alloway notes, the Venice Biennale did not initiate the consideration of modern art using the techniques of art history, which was already underway in the 1920s with Alfred H. Barr Jr.’s exhibitions at MoMA and Christian Zervos’s Picasso catalogue raisonné project; see Alloway, *The Venice Biennale*, 154, note 4. I am grateful to Tadeu Chiarelli for bringing the Belting text to my attention.

¹³ The first Documenta exhibition did include Kurt Schwitters & Otto Dix, though the exhibition remained largely dedicated to formal abstraction; see *Documenta: Kunst des XX Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1955). The inclusion of Russian Constructivism at the São Paulo Bienal or Venice Biennale was made impossible by the political context of the Cold War and Russia’s resulting lack of participation in the events.

¹⁴ The comparable shows at the Venice Biennale were the Picasso and Klee exhibitions at the twenty-fourth Venice Biennale in 1948 organized, respectively, by the Italian artist Renato Guttuso and Swiss art historian Max Huggler. Each show was small, with the Klee show consisting of eighteen works and the Picasso exhibition including twenty-two works drawn almost entirely from a single private collection. The De Stijl exhibition shown at the twenty-sixth Venice Biennale in 1952 was impressive in its own right, having previously been shown at MoMA, however the Bienal exhibition was unmatched in the number and quality of Mondrian assembled; see *XXIV Biennale di Venezia: Catalogo*, 4th ed. (Venice: Serenissima, 1948), 154–55, 189–91; *XXVI Biennale di Venezia: Catalogo* (Venice: Alfieri, 1952).

¹⁵ Documentos Históricos, II Bienal, boxes 1–2, 6, 25–26, 34, AHWS; Acervo Mário Pedrosa, box 3, file 5, BN.

¹⁶ Mário Pedrosa, “Klee, o ponto de partida,” 1953, in Pedrosa, *Textos escolhidos*, vol. 4, *Modernidade cá e lá*, ed. Otilia Arantes (São Paulo: Edusp, 2000), 192.

¹⁷ Documentos Históricos, II Bienal, box 25, files 5 – 6; *II Bienal*, 56–62; *Paul Klee, 1879–1940* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1953).

¹⁸ Alloway, *The Venice Biennale*, 134; Belting, *Art History After Modernism*, 37.

¹⁹ Marins, “O Parque Ibirapuera,” 26–33; Oliveira, “Modelos urbanísticos modernos,” 409–10. See the author’s discussion of Niemeyer’s unrealized sculpture for the site: Adele Nelson, “Monumental and Ephemeral: The Early São Paulo Bienais,” in Mary Kate O’Hare, *Constructive Spirit: Abstract Art in South and North America, 1920s–50s* (Newark: Newark Museum, forthcoming 2010), 127–28, 138.

²⁰ I am grateful to Tadeu Chiarelli for encouraging me to think about the differences between the display of works on the grounds of the Venice Biennale and in Niemeyer’s modernist buildings, as I am to him for the kind invitation to present my work, in May 2009, at the Seminários Internos, Grupo de Estudos do Centro de Pesquisa Arte & Fotografia in the Departamento de Artes Plásticas, Escola de Comunicações e Artes, Universidade de São Paulo. The first Documenta exhibition was also installed in a historical building; see Belting, *Art History After Modernism*, 39–40.

²¹ See, for example, Mário Pedrosa, *Panorama da pintura moderna* (Rio de Janeiro: Ministério da Educação e Saúde, 1951), reprinted in Pedrosa, *Textos escolhidos*, vol. 4, *Modernidade cá e lá*, 135–75; Sérgio Milliet, “Da pintura moderna,” *Tres conferências* (Rio de Janeiro: Ministério da Educação e Cultura, 1955), 24–40. Writings by the influential Argentine critic Jorge Romero Brest also shaped the local understanding of modern art; see, for example, *La pintura europea contemporánea, 1900–1950* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1952).

²² The Brazilian artists who went to live in Paris, Tarsila do Amaral, Maria Martins, and Cícero Dias, often forged sustained contacts with the Parisian art world, and French art made its way into local exhibitions with a notable regularity prior to the Bienal. Early examples of exhibitions of French art include the *Exposition de l’École de Paris* in Recife, Rio, and São Paulo in 1930 and the *Exposição francesa* at the Galeria Prestes Maia, São Paulo, in 1945. Others include *Pintura européia contemporânea* (Rio de Janeiro: MAM-RJ, 1949), *A nova pintura francesa e seus mestres: De Manet a nossos dias* (Rio de Janeiro: MES, 1949), *Do figurativismo ao abstracionismo* (São Paulo: MAM-SP, 1949), and *Exposição do cubismo* (Rio de Janeiro: MAM-RJ, 1950); see Aracy A. Amaral, “The Advent of Geometric Abstraction,” in Amaral, ed., *Arte construtiva no Brasil: Coleção Adolpho Leirner* (São Paulo: DBA Arte Gráficas, 1998) 48–49; Valéria Piccoli, “Cronologia, 1945–1964,” in Amaral, *Arte construtiva*, 278–83.

²³ Aracy A. Amaral, “The History of a Collection,” in *Perfil de um acervo: Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo*, ed. Amaral (São Paulo: Techint, 1988), 13–16; Vera d’Horta, “O Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo,” in *MAM: Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo* (São Paulo: DBA Artes Gráficas, 1995), 16–20.

²⁴ Several newspapers dedicated lengthy series to the historical exhibitions. See, for example, Antônio Bento, “Picasso e Mondrian na II Bienal de São Paulo,” *Diário carioca*, January 10, 1953, sec. 2, 2; José Geraldo Vieira, “Retrospectiva de Picasso,” *Folha da manhã*, February 7, 1954, Atualidades e comentários section, 3.

²⁵ *II Bienal*, 68–71. The artists exhibited included: Martín Blaszko, Claudio Girola, Alfredo Hlito, Enio Iommi, Gyula Kosice, Raúl Lozza, Tomás Maldonado, and Lidy Prati. I am grateful to María Amalia García and Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro for their generous identification of the individual and works of art pictured in fig. 11.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 300–305. The introduction to the Uruguayan display in the Bienal catalogue explained that the

selection commission sought to identify the most up-to-date tendencies and discerned two distinct trends: new, nonfigurative art by José Pedro Costigliolo, Maria Freire, and Antonio Llorens; and the work of Torres- García and his followers, including Alpuj, Gonzalo Fonseca, Francisco Matto, Amalia Nieto, and Augusto Torres.

²⁷ Ibid., 113, 309–10. The artists exhibiting new geometric abstract works included Mario Carreño, Sandú Darié, and Luis Martínez Pedro, from Cuba, and Armando Barrios, Carlos González Bogen, and Mateo Manaure, from Venezuela.

²⁸ Ibid., 27–30, 34–36, 38–39, 43. Grupo Ruptura artists included Geraldo de Barros, Lothar Charoux, Luiz Sacilotto, and Anatol Wladyslaw and soon-to-be Grupo Frente members included Aluísio Carvão, Lygia Clark, Abraham Palatnik, Ivan Serpa, Décio Vieira, and Franz Weissmann

²⁹ Though the Calder mobile in Matarazzo's collection, *Large White Moblie* (1948) was listed in the catalogue and requested by D'Harnoncourt for the exhibition, the work is neither visible in the installation views of the exhibition nor included in D'Harnoncourt's sketch of the final installation (see **fig. 13**). Furthermore, though the work is listed as belonging to MAM-SP in the Bienal catalogue, it was given to the Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo in 1963 as a donation from Matarazzo's private collection; see *II Bienal*, 147; Amaral, *Perfil de um acervo*, 110. For installation views of the Calder exhibition, see Roberta Saraiva, *Calder in Brazil: The Tale of a Friendship* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2006), 163–73.

³⁰ Willy Lewin, "Os 'móviles' de Calder," *Jornal do comércio*, October 11, 1959, trans. in Saraiva, *Calder in Brazil*, 220. I have used the latter, with a slight modification.

³¹ I am grateful to Paulo Herkenhoff for encouraging me to consider Visconti's inclusion in the Bienal, speaking with me about the artist and Pedrosa's interest in him, and sharing the manuscript of his essay "Rio de Janeiro: A paisagem da modernidade brasileira" to be included in a forthcoming publication dedicated to the landscape paintings of Rio in the Fadel Collection.

³² Documentos Históricas, II Bienal, box 2, file 4; box 6, file 10, AHWS.

³³ Aracy A. Amaral, *Arte para quê? A preocupação social na arte brasileira, 1930–1970*, 3rd ed. (São Paulo: Studio Nobel, 2003), 245–61; Francisco Alambert and Polyana Canhête, *As Bienais de São Paulo: Da era do museu à era dos curadores (1951–2001)* (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2004), 40–48.

³⁴ Some modernist artists, such as Tarsila do Amaral, Emiliano Di Cavalcanti, and Maria Martins submitted works to the general selection and were included in the show, while a number of modernists refused to submit works, most notably Cândido Portinari. For press criticism of the lack of modernists' representation at the Bienal, see Manuel Germano, "Observações concretas do visitante abstrato," *Habitat*, no. 16 (May–June 1954), 48–49; "A Bienal – Obra de cultura?" *Fundamentos* 6, no. 34 (1954), 33–37.

³⁵ I am indebted to Paulo Herkenhoff for this suggestion made during our conversation on June 11, 2009.

³⁶ Mário Pedrosa, "Visconti dantas das modernas gerações," 1950, in Pedrosa, *Textos escolhidos*, vol. 3, *Acadêmicos e modernos*, ed. Otilia Arantes (São Paulo: Edusp, 2004), 119–33.

³⁷ *Exposição retrospectiva de Visconti: II Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo* (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1954).

³⁸ The exhibition opened on June 30, 1954 and was held at the Galerie IBEU, Rio de Janeiro. The group would go on to exhibit three more times in 1955 and 1956. On Grupo Frente, see Mário Pedrosa, "Grupo Frente," 1955, in Pedrosa, *Textos escolhidos*, vol. 3, *Acadêmicos e modernos*, 245–51; Frederico Moraes, "Grupo Frente—a primeira turma," in *Ciclo de exposições sobre arte no Rio de Janeiro: 2) Grupo Frente, 1954–1956; 3) I Exposição nacional de arte abstrata, Hotel Quitandinha, 1953* (Rio de Janeiro: Galerie de Arte BANERJ, 1984); Ferreira Gullar, "Frente Group and the Neo-Concrete Reaction," in Amaral, *Arte construtiva*, 143–54.

³⁹ Pedrosa, "Grupo Frente," 246, 248.

⁴⁰ Pedrosa, "Grupo Frente," 246. Here Pedrosa was, in part, countering the already forming perception of Grupo Frente as another abstract art group; see, for example, "A 1ª exposição do 'Grupo Frente,'" *O Globo*, July 1954, Associação Cultural "O Mundo de Lygia Clark."

⁴¹ Ivan Serpa to Jayme Mauricio in interview in *Correio da manhã*, July 16, 1955, quoted in Moraes, "Grupo Frente—a primeira turma."

⁴² On biennial exhibitions' neglect of specificities in favor of "an all-encompassing and representative vision," see Mesquita and Cohen, "Introduction," 18.

⁴³ According to the artists' account compiled by Morais, they discussed the names "vanguardia" (vanguard) and "grupo renovador" (renovator group), but Serpa dismissed both as too academic. Instead, he proposed the name "front," possibly based on the word poet Ferreira Gullar inscribed on the front cover of his notebooks. Morais, "Grupo Frente—a primeira turma."

Figures

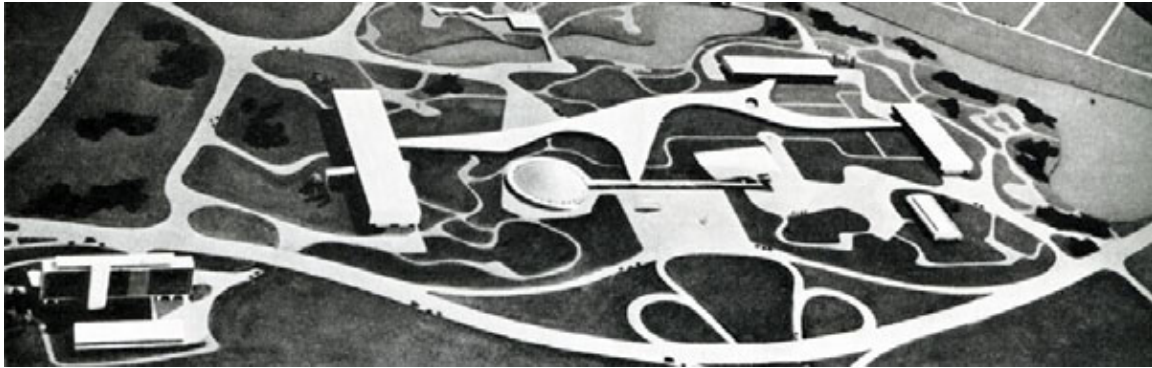


Fig. 1

Oscar Niemeyer, Approved site plan of Ibirapuera Park, São Paulo, Brazil, 1953. The five buildings connected by the central walkway are, from left to right: Pavilion of Industries, Pavilion of the Arts, Auditorium, Pavilion of States, and Pavilion of Nations. Reproduced in Henrique Mindlin's *Modern Architecture in Brazil* (1956)



Fig. 2
Spread from *Módulo: Revista de arquitetura e artes plásticas* (March 1955)

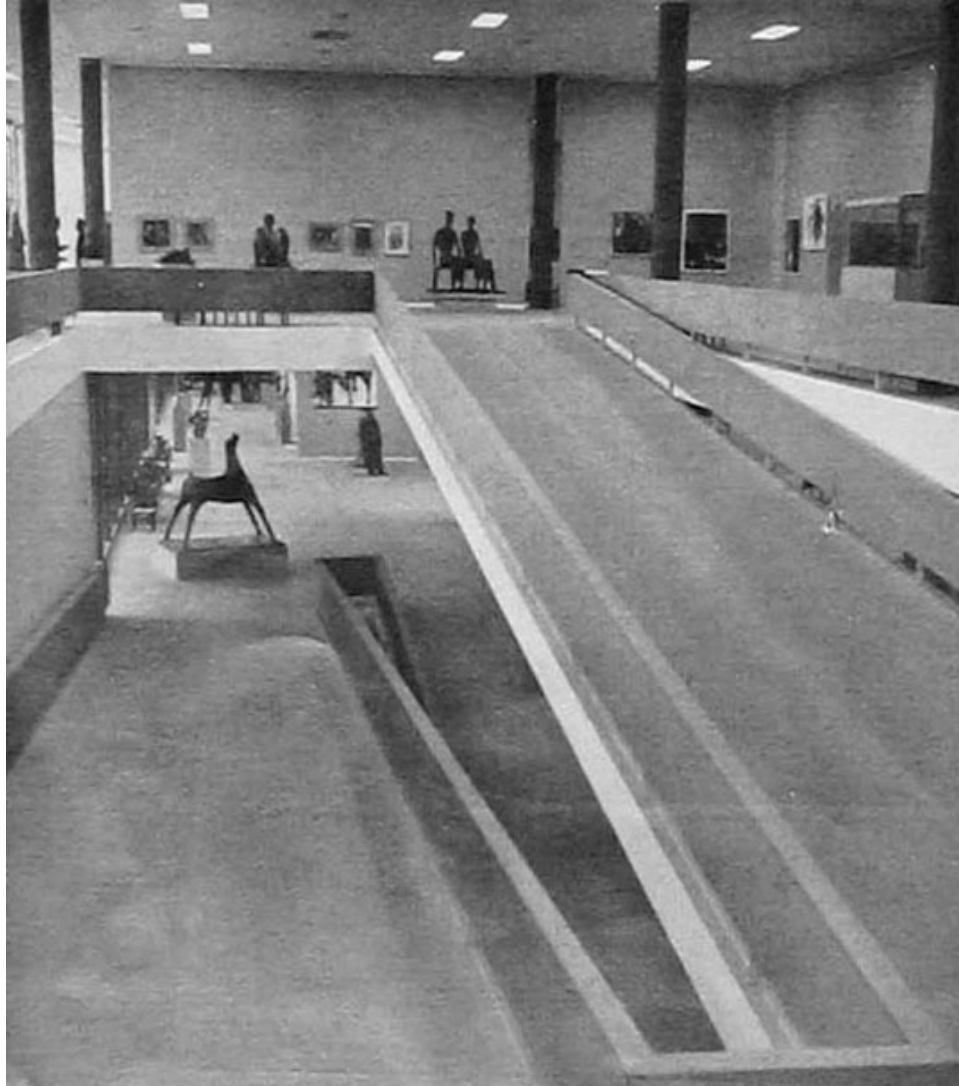
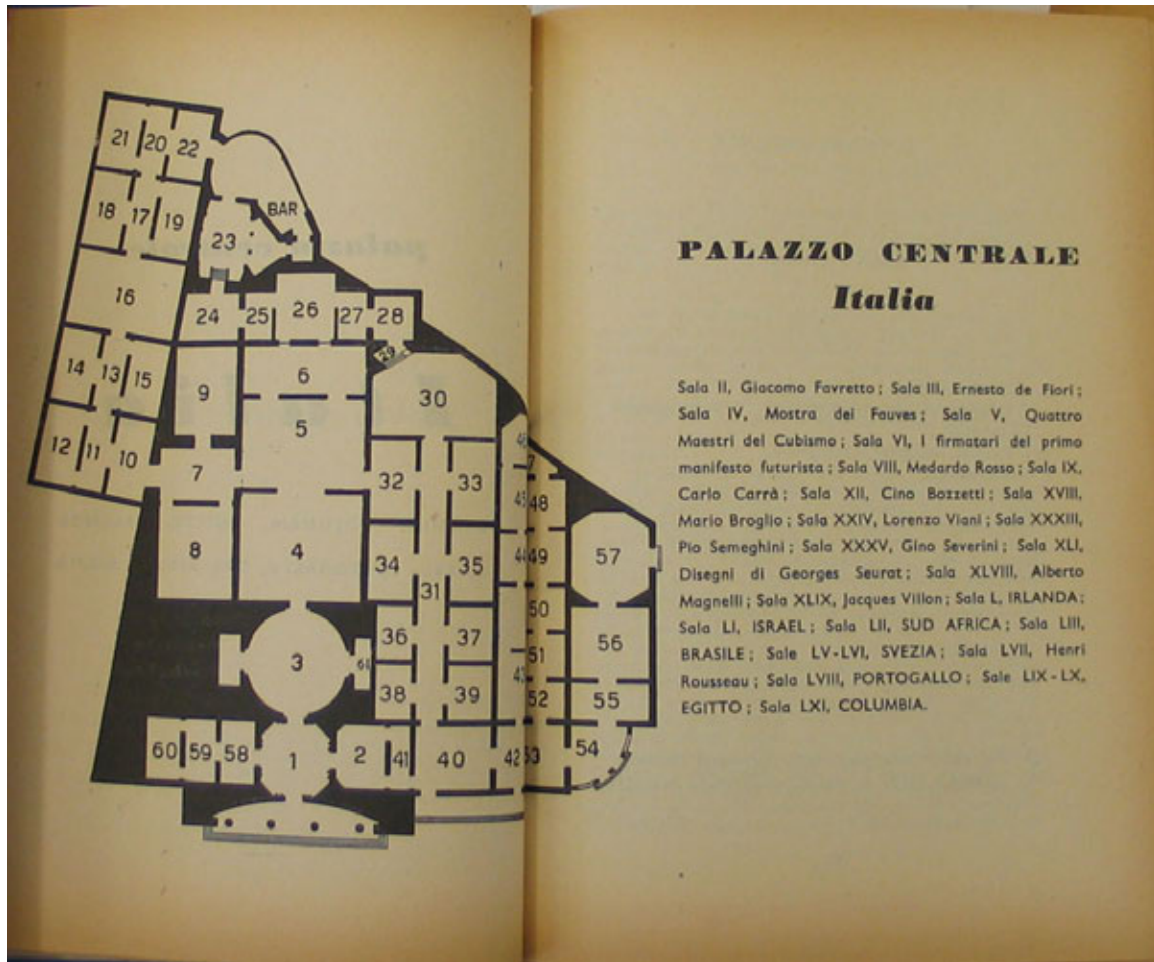


Fig. 3
Installation view of sculptures by Marino Marini and Henry Moore in the Pavilion of Nations at the second Bienal de São Paulo, 1953–54. Reproduced in *Módulo: Revista de arquitetura e artes plásticas* (March 1955)



PALAZZO CENTRALE *Italia*

Sala II, Giacomo Favretto; Sala III, Ernesto de Fiori; Sala IV, Mostra dei Fauves; Sala V, Quattro Maestri del Cubismo; Sala VI, I firmatari del primo manifesto futurista; Sala VIII, Medardo Rosso; Sala IX, Carlo Carrà; Sala XII, Cino Bozzetti; Sala XVIII, Mario Broglio; Sala XXIV, Lorenzo Viani; Sala XXXIII, Pio Semeghini; Sala XXXV, Gino Severini; Sala XL, Disegni di Georges Seurat; Sala XLVIII, Alberto Magnelli; Sala XLIX, Jacques Villon; Sala L, IRLANDA; Sala LI, ISRAEL; Sala LII, SUD AFRICA; Sala LIII, BRASILE; Sala LV-LVI, SVEZIA; Sala LVII, Henri Rousseau; Sala LVIII, PORTOGALLO; Sala LIX-LX, EGITTO; Sala LXI, COLUMBIA.

Fig. 4
Plan for Central Pavilion at the twentieth-fifth Venice Biennale, 1950. Reproduced in *XXV Biennale di Venezia: Catalogo* (1950)

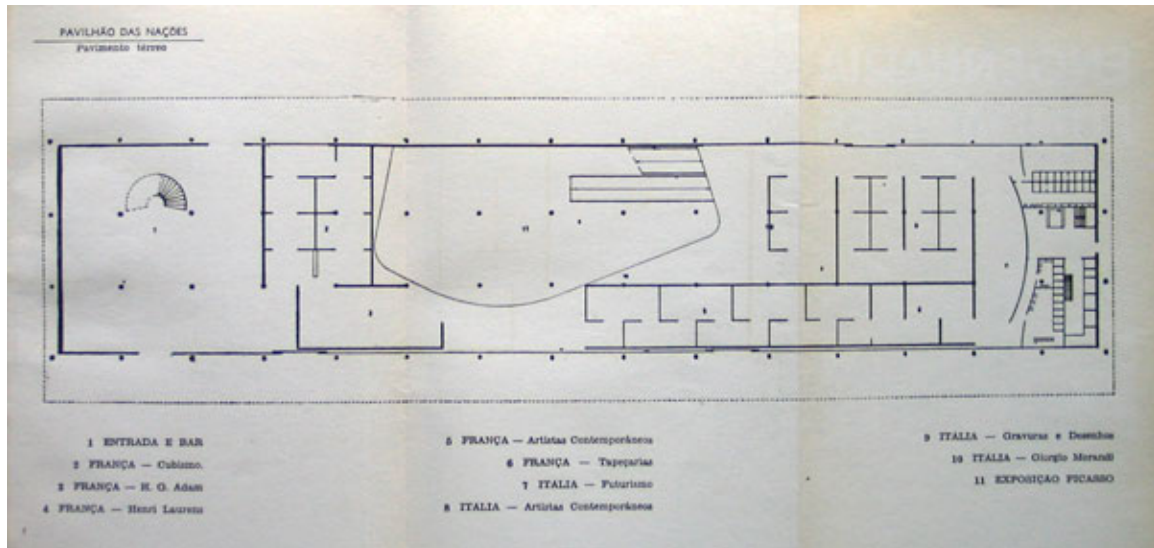


Fig. 6
Plan of ground floor of the Pavilion of Nations at the second Bienal de São Paulo, 1953–54. Reproduced in *II Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo: Catálogo geral* (1953)

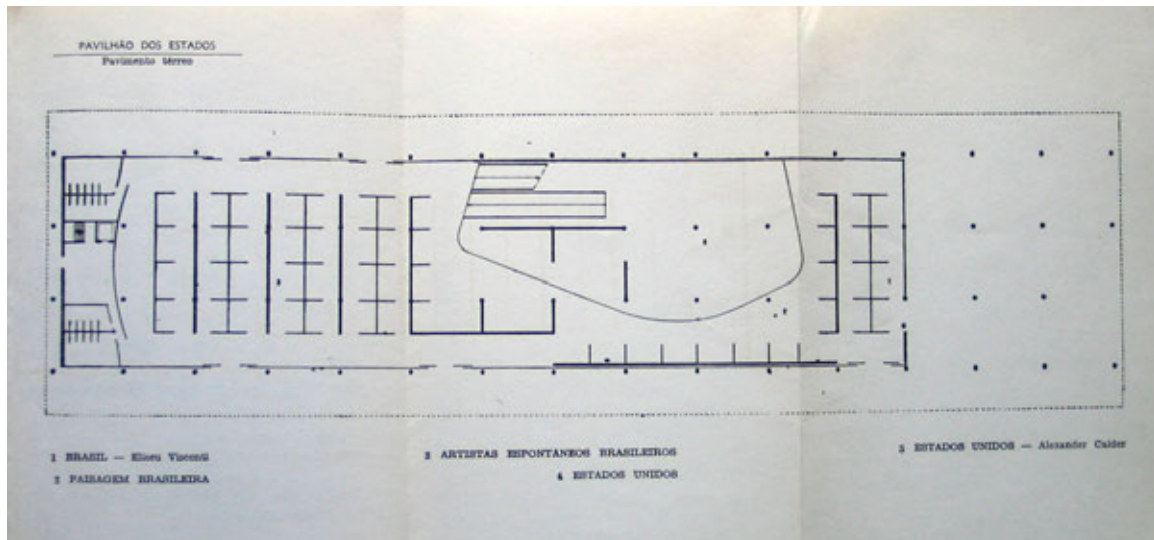


Fig. 7
Plan of ground floor of the Pavilion of States at the second Bienal de São Paulo, 1953–54. Reproduced in *II Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo: Catálogo geral* (1953)

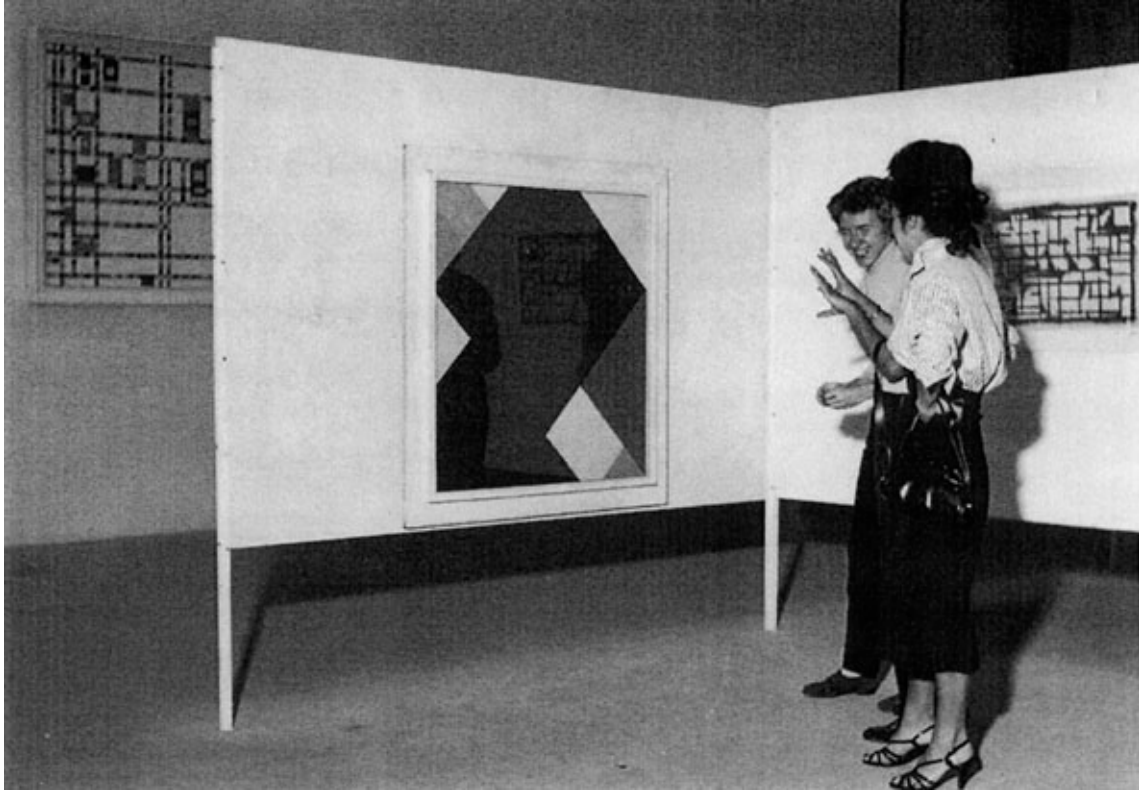


Fig. 8
Installation view of de Stijl exhibition in the Pavilion of Nations at the second Bienal de São Paulo, 1953–54. In the foreground, Theo van Doesburg's *Counter-Composition V* (1924) and in background, Piet Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1942–43).
Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo



Fig. 9
Installation view of the Pablo Picasso retrospective and Henri-Georges Adam exhibition
in the Pavilion of Nations at the second Bienal de São Paulo, 1953–54. Arquivo Histórico
Wanda Svevo, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo



Fig. 10
Installation view of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) in the Pavilion of Nations at the second Bienal de São Paulo, 1953–54. Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo

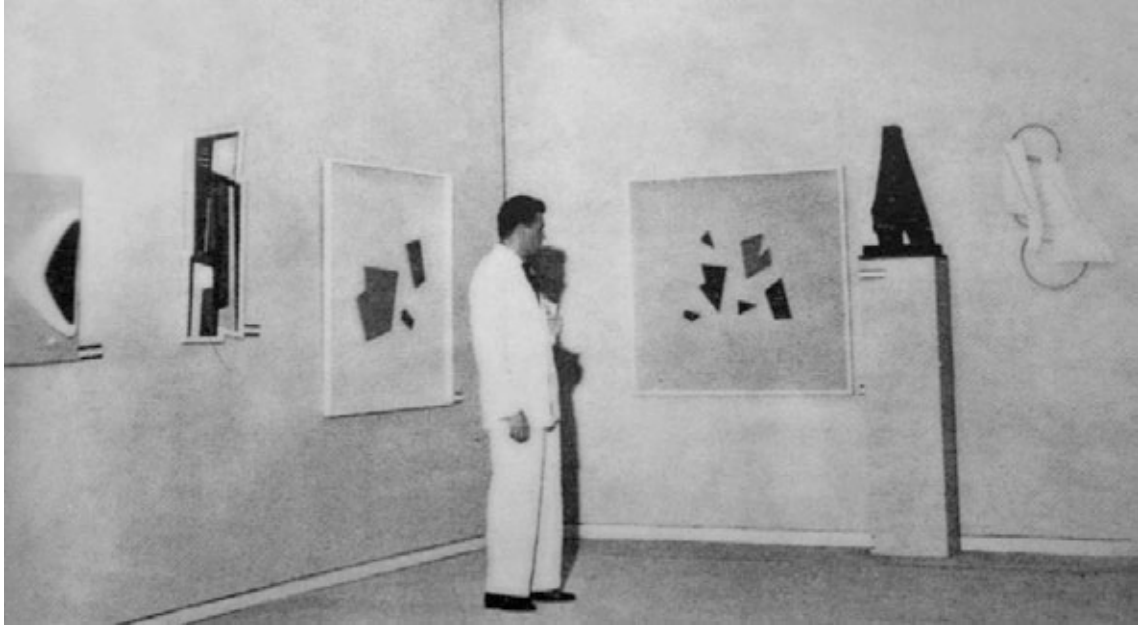


Fig. 11

Installation view of the Argentine exhibition in the Pavilions of States at the second Bienal de São Paulo, 1953–54. Gyula Kosice stands among works by, from left to right, unknown, Martín Blaszko, Raúl Lozza, Lozza, possibly Blaszko, and Kosice. Reproduced in *Arte Madí Universal* (1954)



Fig. 12
Installation view of the Alexander Calder retrospective in the Pavilion of States at the second Bienal de São Paulo. Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo

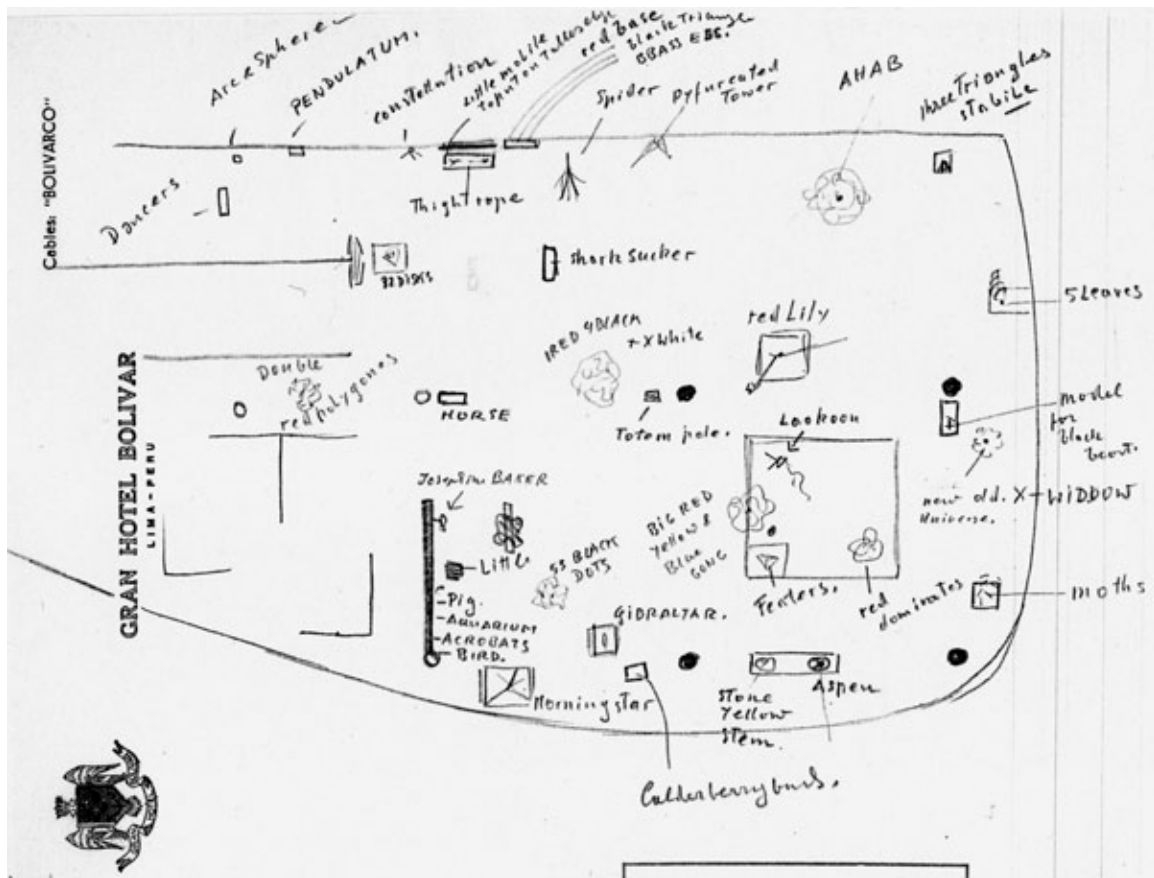


Fig. 13
 René D'Harnoncourt, Sketch of the Alexander Calder retrospective in the Pavilions of States at the second Bienal de São Paulo, 1953-54. The cloud-like forms indicate the placement of the mobiles. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York

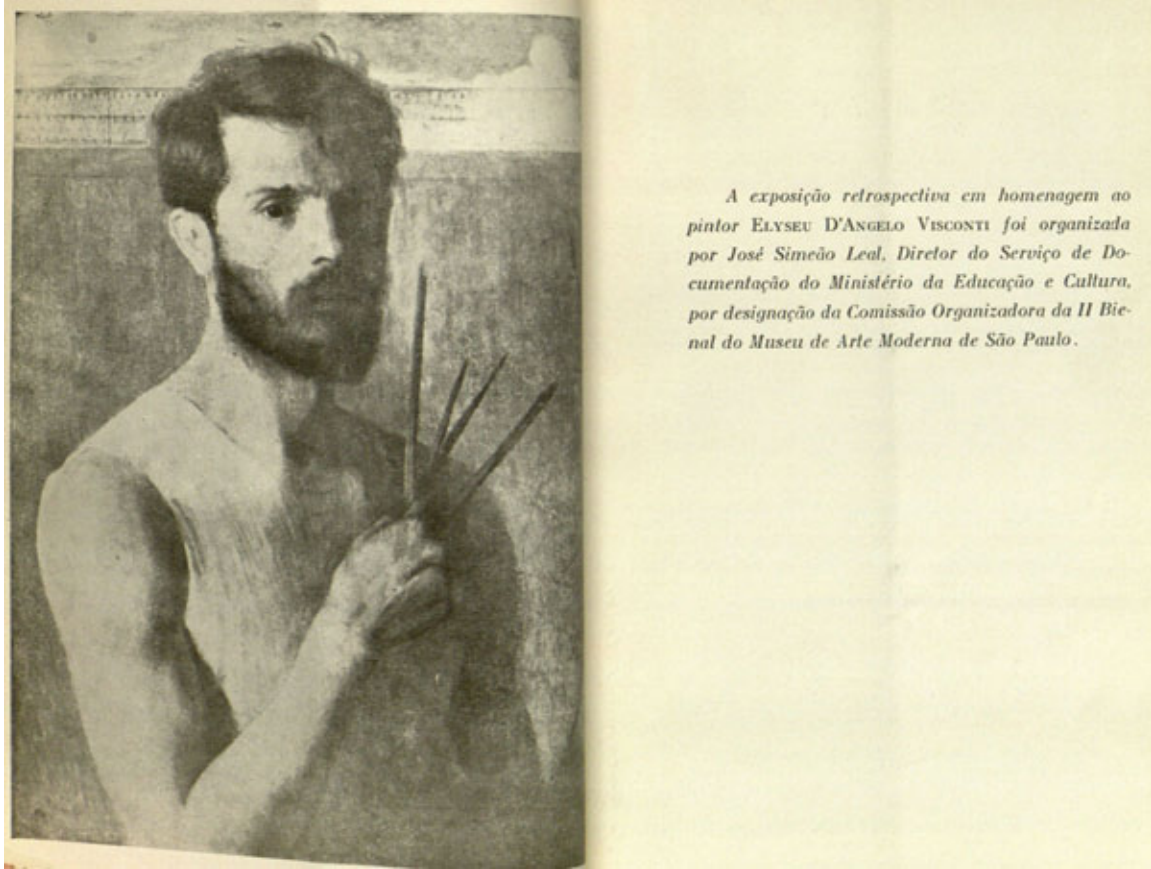


Fig. 14
Frontispiece and title page from *Exposição retrospectiva de Visconti* (1954)



Fig. 15
Installation view of the first Grupo Frente exhibition at the Galeria IBEU, Rio de Janeiro, 1954. From left to right, Aluísio Carvão, Eric Baruch, Vincent Ibberson, Lygia Pape, Mathilde Pereira de Sousa, Elisa Martins da Silveira, Vera Ibberson, and Ambassador of Canada in Brazil and his wife. Reproduced in *Ciclo de exposições sobre arte no Rio de Janeiro* (1984)

A controversial juryman: Alfred Barr Jr. at the 4th São Paulo Biennial of 1957

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In October 1957, Lourival Gomes Machado, art critic and former director of the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art and of the 1st São Paulo Biennial, would reproach Alfred Barr Jr., American critic and former director of MoMA, for “not knowing anything at all about Brazil’s artistic reality”. According to Machado, Barr, a member of the jury of the 4th São Paulo Biennial, had accused the organizers of the event of withholding the participation of the engraver Livio Abramo by choosing him for the jury.

During an altogether polemic Biennial, in which many artists who were not selected confronted the jury and the administrative staff of the event, the controversy created by Barr also aimed at Brazilian and Argentinean concrete art, which he regarded as mere “bauhauserercise”. This would cause a direct reaction from the critic Mário Pedrosa, at the time aligned with the concrete artists: in his opinion Barr wanted Brazilian art to meet the international taste of that period – Pedrosa meant Abstract Expressionism.

This paper examines the relations between Alfred Barr Jr. and the Brazilian artistic scene, focusing on articles by Gomes Machado and Pedrosa, well respected critics during the 1950’s and 1960’s. Barr’s opinions, condemned by them, would stir even more the spirits of this event. The idea is to understand the consequences of Barr’s presence in São Paulo during the 4th Biennial and also to examine his relationship with Brazilian art by analyzing the Brazilian version of his book *What is Modern Painting?*, published in 1953.

Um jurado controverso: Alfred Barr Jr. na 4ª Bienal de São Paulo em 1957

Ana Cândida de Avelar

Em outubro de 1957, o crítico de arte Lourival Gomes Machado, ex-diretor do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo e da 1ª Bienal promovida por esse mesmo museu, repreenderia o crítico norte-americano e ex-diretor do Museu de Arte Moderna de Nova York, Alfred Barr Jr., por desconhecer “a realidade artística do Brasil”. De acordo com Gomes Machado, Barr – ambos eram membros do júri da 4ª Bienal Internacional de São Paulo –, havia acusado os organizadores do evento de colocarem o gravador Livio Abramo como jurado impedindo-o de participar da mostra como artista. Da mesma maneira, Barr não estava satisfeito com a seção de escultura brasileira, segundo ele, amostra insuficiente para a avaliação da crítica estrangeira, apesar da qualidade dos trabalhos em geral. Em contraposição, Gomes Machado chamou esta edição do evento de a “Bienal da escultura¹”.

Durante essa edição bastante polêmica da Bienal – muitos dos artistas não selecionados confrontaram o júri e os responsáveis pela mostra –, a controvérsia criada por Barr também tinha como alvo a arte concreta brasileira e argentina, tidas por ele como mero “bauhausexercise²”. Essa declaração causaria uma reação imediata do crítico Mário Pedrosa, na época alinhado aos artistas concretos: para ele, Barr, bem como a maioria dos críticos estrangeiros, desejava que a arte brasileira acompanhasse o desenvolvimento da arte internacional do período.

Este trabalho examina as relações entre Alfred Barr Jr. e a cena artística brasileira, tendo por foco os posicionamentos de Gomes Machado e Pedrosa, críticos consagrados durante a década de 1950, além do próprio depoimento do crítico estadunidense por ocasião da 4ª Bienal. A postura de Barr durante o evento e suas opiniões sobre a arte brasileira, de um modo geral condenadas pelos dois críticos brasileiros citados, seriam

responsáveis por inflamar ainda mais uma edição já bastante controversa devido às escolhas – e exclusões – da comissão de seleção.

Quando Barr vem a São Paulo em 1957 já não era mais diretor do MoMA, porém sua influência permanecia significativa dentro da instituição. Havia se tornado diretor das coleções, trabalhando bastante próximo do diretor-geral René d'Harnoncourt até 1967. Além disso, o modelo de museu concebido por Barr foi uma importante referência para o MAM-SP, criado por Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho em 1948 e dirigido pelo crítico belga Leon Degand nos primeiros meses³.

A idéia aqui é entender as conseqüências da presença de Barr em São Paulo durante o evento atentando para aspectos de sua relação com a arte brasileira. No sentido de aprofundar essa questão, serão examinadas igualmente suas posições sobre arte no Brasil expressas no livro *Que é a Pintura Moderna? (What is Modern Painting?)*, na versão brasileira de 1953, cuja versão original norte-americana saíra dez anos antes. A versão brasileira contempla representantes célebres da tradição modernista local: Candido Portinari, Alberto da Veiga Guignard e Lasar Segall figuram em diferentes seções do livro que se organiza sob conceitos amplos, como “Realismo: o homem comum”, na qual se encontra ainda Heitor dos Prazeres, pintor autodidata e entendido por Barr como um “primitivo moderno⁴”.

O esforço de Barr sempre fora no sentido de buscar uma maior aceitação da arte moderna e seu interesse pela produção artística brasileira do século XX surge nos anos 1940, quando organiza as exposições *Portinari of Brazil* e *The Latin American Collection at the Museum of Modern Art*⁵.

Reconhecimento ou desconhecimento?

Se Barr havia feito declarações inadequadas porque não dominava suficientemente as questões da arte brasileira, como afirma Gomes Machado, provocando

ainda mais júri e artistas excluídos⁶, ao menos seu interesse por essa produção era evidente⁷.

Assim, é possível levantar a hipótese de que talvez Barr buscasse na produção brasileira de fins de 1950 algo próximo do que já conhecia em termos de modernismo brasileiro na década anterior. Esta hipótese pode ser confirmada pelas palavras de Pedrosa, que sugere que o olhar de Barr seria orientado pela Escola de Paris.

Que preferia o ilustre ex-diretor do Museu de Arte Moderna de Nova Iorque? Que os jovens artistas brasileiros ou argentinos se deixassem influenciar mais uma vez por Picasso, Rouault, Soutine ou mesmo por algumas das glórias descobertas pelo mesmo museu, gênero Peter Blume⁸?

A referência a Blume não é gratuita – de fato esse pintor dispunha de lugar privilegiado na opinião de Barr. Segundo o crítico estadunidense, a obra *A Cidade Eterna*, 1934-37, incluída em mais de uma edição de seu livro, causou polêmica ao ser exposta por tratar de temas políticos da Europa desse período. Diz Barr:

A Cidade Eterna foi um importante marco no revolucionário regresso ao interesse pelos temas na pintura, regresso iniciado em 1920. A arte vive num estado de revolução, às vezes gradativa e às vezes repentina. E, tal como na política, as idéias revolucionárias em arte tornam-se, depois de geralmente aceitas, parte da opinião conservadora, a qual, por sua vez, precisa defender-se contra a nova revolução⁹.

A questão dos “temas políticos” o leva a comparar Blume a Orozco, quanto ao quesito alegoria, e amarrar a análise com um exame da *Guernica*, 1937, de Picasso. Entretanto, o figurativismo engajado de Blume parecia não interessar minimamente a Pedrosa.

Embora fosse possível que Barr não detivesse profundo conhecimento da cena artística brasileira de meados dos anos 1950, estamos certos de que não ignorava a produção das décadas anteriores. Nesse sentido, é plausível pensar em termos do reconhecimento por parte de Barr de alguns artistas em oposição a certo

“desconhecimento” em relação a outros, quando não se adaptam à sua concepção formada por categorias pré-figuradas decorrentes dos “ismos” da história da arte do século XX. Barr era determinado na busca por aquilo que preenchesse os requisitos do que entendia por arte moderna: multiplicidade e variedade, porém sempre atentando para as tais categorias que criara. É nesse sentido que traremos alguns aspectos da formação de sua visão artística.

Iniciação artística pelo *grand-tour*

Antes da fundação do MoMA nos anos 1920, Barr, ainda estudante, vai à Europa no que se constituiu numa espécie de *grand tour* artístico – quando conhece inúmeros artistas e galeristas ligados à vanguarda que acabariam formando seu olhar crítico. Esses contatos, as exposições que vê e os museus que visita auxiliam-no na concepção de uma estrutura de museu que abarcasse manifestações artísticas de várias modalidades. Para ele, o design moderno, por exemplo, era tão digno de figurar na coleção do MoMA quanto pintura e escultura. Sua concepção de arte moderna não dava margem a nacionalismos ou a qualquer outro aspecto que transcendesse a realidade formal da obra, aquilo que supostamente seria intrínseco a elas: um olhar que pode ser chamado, grosso modo, de formalista¹⁰ e que não se interessava por nenhum tipo de contextualização histórica¹¹. Assim, Barr retirava das vertentes modernas conflitos a elas inerentes. Um exemplo importante dessa atitude deve ser examinado na sua visão sobre arte vanguardista russa do início do século passado, da qual ele subtraía qualquer possibilidade dessa manifestação ser pensada também a partir do contexto revolucionário que a fez emergir.

Com uma formação baseada no entendimento formal das obras – Barr parece um misto de *connoisseur* e crítico da arte – durante os anos 1940, ele estende seu interesse à produção moderna latino-americana. Seu objetivo maior sempre fora de divulgar a arte moderna e isso o levaria a despender esforços pela América Central e do Sul.

Antecedentes: Barr, o MoMA e a arte latino-americana

Portanto, o objetivo de Alfred Barr Jr. de expandir os domínios da arte moderna compreende todas as Américas. Em 1933, ele chega a apresentar um diagrama ao comitê de diretores do MoMA, no qual está representada a coleção do museu sob a forma de um “torpedo viajando através do tempo¹²”. Segundo o diagrama, a coleção naquele momento é em grande parte formada por obras da Escola de Paris, “resto da Europa” e arte norte-americana, seguidos por trabalhos dos impressionistas e pós-impressionistas, além de Courbet, Daumier e Corot, Ingres, Constable e Goya. O diagrama se altera em 1941, quando as produções dos EUA e México passam a liderar a coleção¹³, pois, em 1935, o MoMA recebe como doação de Abby Rockefeller uma série de pinturas dos muralistas mexicanos José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera e David Alfaro Siqueiros. Em 1943, Nelson Rockefeller cria o Fundo Interamericano – possivelmente aceitando sugestão de Barr – com o propósito de aumentar a coleção¹⁴.

No mesmo ano, Lincoln Kirstein, amigo de Barr e curador de algumas mostras, vem à América do Sul e Barr vai à Cuba e ao México, ambos visando à aquisição de obras que figurariam na mostra *The Latin American Collection of The Museum of Modern Art*. Fruto dessa exposição é o livro homônimo, constituindo-se na primeira pesquisa em inglês sobre arte latino-americana, com ênfase nos trabalhos adquiridos pelo museu. O prefácio escrito por Barr explica sua intenção: visava o contato com a produção artística das Américas no pós-guerra. Aparentemente, essa viagem de Kirstein e Barr rende um aumento mais do que significativo da coleção de obras latino-americanas – a coleção teria passado de 38 a 300 obras; além disso, a coleção geral passaria a ter mais obras de países latino-americanos do que europeus. Kirstein viria a ser um tipo de consultor de arte latino-americana.

Uma nova mostra de arte latino-americana é organizada em 1945: *Paintings from Latin America in the Museum Collection*. O contraponto dessas mostras se dá por *La Pintura Contemporanea Norteamericana*, elaborada para circular em capitais da América Latina¹⁵. No prefácio, declarava-se que a “arte era o melhor embaixador” a ser enviado para expressar os sentimentos estadunidenses em relação aos outros países da América. Segundo Zilah Quezado Deckker, o encantamento por parte dos EUA com a América Latina e em especial com o Brasil – considerado um futuro aliado político – esmaeceu-se com o fim da Segunda Guerra Mundial e a mudança de diretores do MoMA¹⁶. Entretanto, não se pode esquecer que Barr, ainda que nos bastidores, continuava a atuar nas coleções do MoMA e que em 1957 ele mesmo viria à Bienal paulista.

Barr e Portinari

A primeira aquisição de um trabalho sul-americano para o museu é justamente *Morro*, de Candido Portinari, em 1939 – é também o primeiro trabalho de um artista latino-americano não mexicano na coleção. Barr havia conhecido o trabalho do pintor nesse mesmo ano, por meio dos murais elaborados para o Pavilhão do Brasil na Feira Mundial de Nova York. *Morro* é incluído na exposição *Art of Our Time* e a compra rende-lhe um convite para expor no MoMA em 1940, dando origem à mostra *Portinari of Brazil*. Essa seria a primeira exposição de um artista latino-americano na nova sede do museu. Por ocasião da mostra, a Chicago University Press lança *Portinari, his Life and Art*. Em 1941, *Murals by Candido Portinari*, uma seleção da mostra do ano anterior, circularia nos EUA. Em 1944, *Modern Painters of Brazil* confirmaria o evidente interesse pela arte moderna brasileira.

Que é a pintura moderna?

A importância conferida por Barr ao caráter didático que deveria desempenhar o MoMA, no sentido de garantir ao público uma maior intimidade com a arte moderna, levou-o a escrever *What is Modern Painting?* em 1943. Chama atenção a presença praticamente dominante de pinturas figurativas, enquanto que os artistas abstratos, como Kandinsky e Mondrian, aparecem em menor número.

A análise de Barr é norteada por subtítulos ou “eixos”¹⁷ que constituem aspectos fundamentais da arte moderna para ele, encaixando sob essas categorias as obras que julga mais significativas. Não há uma importância conferida ao local de produção delas, bem como seu aspecto cronológico é secundário. É provável, pela estrutura criada para a análise, que qualquer trabalho moderno considerado de qualidade pelo crítico poderia ser servir em uma das seções. O eixo “expressionismo”, por exemplo, abrange os subtítulos: “transformação do mundo”, “espírito religioso”, “a pintura é como música” – nesta seção se encaixam Gauguin, Kandinsky e Matisse; na seção “os construtores: a pintura em busca da geometria”: figuram Cézanne e Seurat, entre outros. O crítico divide a pintura moderna em duas tendências gerais: aquela que discute o mundo real ou externo – formada por realistas e impressionistas; e a que trata do universo interno do ser humano, preocupa-se com o mundo mental, as emoções, a imaginação – os expressionistas.

Outro aspecto que confirma a diversificação da arte moderna por um viés formal proposta por Barr são os diagramas pelos quais é conhecido, em termos de metodologia, para se pensar essa produção artística: setas ligam movimentos, tendências e aspectos da arte moderna no Ocidente¹⁸, fugindo à linearidade absoluta e trazendo complexidade à compreensão das várias manifestações.

No entanto, Sybil Gordon Kantor nota que Barr facilita uma interpretação contrária à sua intenção quando expõe as diretrizes do que entende por “modernismo clássico”.

Barr havia deixado a porta aberta quando descreveu o que entendia como os três períodos dos últimos 50 anos: o primeiro era o impressionismo de fins do século XIX; as primeiras décadas do século XX viram “o interesse concentrado... nos valores puramente estéticos do design”; no terceiro período, depois de 1920 (até 1934) “os valores tradicionais da semelhança com a natureza e com o assunto em suas inúmeras associações foram descobertas”¹⁹.

Ou seja: é possível dizer que Barr entendia o modernismo a partir do impressionismo; das manifestações sobretudo de viés abstrato – provavelmente pensando na produção da Bauhaus e do Construtivismo e Suprematismo russos, e no cubismo, entre outros – , até meados da década de 1930, quando teria-se o chamado retorno à ordem da pintura do pós-guerra.

Que é a pintura moderna brasileira?

O livro *What Is Modern Painting?* será reeditado várias vezes e, apesar de *Morro* já fazer parte da coleção do MoMA, a obra só será incluída na versão brasileira – *Que é a Pintura Moderna?* – publicada em parceria com o Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro e de São Paulo em 1953. Na versão de 1946, pensada a partir de obras estadunidenses e européias, Portinari não aparece – apesar de estar na coleção desde 1939.

Na versão brasileira – preparada em 1952, significativamente um ano depois da 1ª Bienal, uma boa oportunidade para lançar um livro de caráter didático sobre a arte moderna – é incluído além de Portinari, Alberto da Veiga Guignard²⁰, ambos representantes do chamado “modernismo brasileiro” de segunda geração. A primeira geração estava representada apenas por Lasar Segall, embora dele somente houvesse menção de “Navio de Imigrantes” e não reprodução da obra. Certamente, Barr não detinha conhecimento das gerações entendidas como constitutivas do modernismo

brasileiro pela historiografia oficial. Como foi dito, Portinari já possuía uma projeção nos Estados Unidos desde os anos 1940; Guignard, entretanto, era, nesse período, menos conhecido internacionalmente²¹, tendo participado da 26ª Bienal de Veneza em 1952. Segall já havia tido alguma projeção no contexto alemão, além de ter exposto em 1948 em individuais em Nova York e Washington. Tanto Guignard como Segall mostraram trabalhos numa exposição que percorreu a Inglaterra na década de 1940; além disso, e sobretudo, já figuravam no rol oficial da história da arte moderna brasileira.

Na versão brasileira os muralistas mexicanos estão incluídos; Barr aprecia principalmente o trabalho de Orozco que “faz pleno uso da liberdade do artista moderno: entrelaça objetos reais e irreais, emprega a técnica cubista de fragmentar a natureza em planos meio abstratos, angulares e emprega desenho intenso emocional e expressionista²²”. Obviamente, o mesmo não acontece com artistas brasileiros nas edições posteriores em língua inglesa, indicando a não inclusão desses na história da arte proposta por Barr.

Os critérios que nortearam as escolhas de Barr para compor o adicional brasileiro da análise não são claros – há que se notar a presença de apenas artistas figurativos, embora a produção abstrata e concreta brasileira já tivesse sido apresentada nas 1ª a 3ª Bienais, esta última, aliás, ocorrida no mesmo ano em que o livro é publicado: 1953. O que parece uni-las, como mencionado, é uma classificação abrangente e pouco definidora – a idéia de modernismo em suas várias manifestações, com artistas escolhidos particularmente dentro da tradição do dito modernismo brasileiro pós-Semana de Arte Moderna. Além disso, Heitor dos Prazeres²³, o único artista que não se encaixa na seleção “modernista pós-1922”, representaria um exemplo do primitivismo brasileiro, como foi dito, eixo este para o crítico estadunidense de grande importância no qual ele situava Henri Rousseau, cuja obra *O Cigano Dormindo*, 1897, considerava uma das melhores obras do MoMA²⁴. É ainda significativa a menção que faz Barr no prefácio de

que somente figuram em sua seleção artistas de reputação firmada. Perguntamo-nos que razões configurariam essas escolhas específicas e não outras de artistas igualmente renomados na cena local.

Morro, de Portinari, aparece sob a rubrica “Realismo: edifícios” acompanhada de *House by the Railroad* (1925), de Edward Hopper, e *American Landscape* (1930), de Charles Sheeler. Obviamente trata-se de uma aproximação por tema. Por um lado, é no mínimo problemático ler *Morro* sob esse encaixe, uma vez que se tratam de trabalhos absolutamente díspares em termos tanto compositivos como de contexto. Por outro, Barr entende o tipo de comentário “social” que está em jogo ali: a vida daqueles moradores em pleno processo de formação das favelas contemporâneas, em contraste com a cidade que se verticaliza aparentemente alheia às desigualdades sociais. Porém, teria notado ele que os edifícios funcionam como um símbolo da modernidade que, justaposto aos barracos, denotam a realidade complexa de um país de passado escravocrata e em processo de larga urbanização? Causa espécie ainda outro comentário do autor: “(...) o realismo satírico de Portinari é suave e direto” – a interpretação desse trecho *sui generis* é praticamente impossível. De que sátira falaria Barr e como seria possível que esta fosse “suave”?

Além disso, se Barr não estivesse comprometido com a divulgação da coleção do MoMA, não seria mais adequado optar pelas paisagens urbanas de Tarsila do Amaral, como *São Paulo* (1924) ou *São Paulo (Gazo)* (1924), nas quais as representações de “edifícios” em cidades inabitadas são mais próximas do que ele buscava ao abordar Hopper e Sheeler? É possível que Barr desconhecesse esses trabalhos, mas desconheceria a artista “modernista” que havia participado das edições I, II e IV da Bienal, esta última quando obteve sala especial?

Ao notar-se que Barr escolhe apenas obras brasileiras que, do ponto de vista do olhar estrangeiro, poderiam demonstrar certo pendor ao registro de aspectos da paisagem

natural e humana brasileiras e à manifestação da cultura local, compreende-se enfim o comentário de Pedrosa, quando afirma que a crítica estrangeira deseja apenas encontrar na arte brasileira o que ela pode fornecer em termos de alteridade.

Em geral, esta é a atitude da maioria dos críticos estrangeiros que nos visitam: ou querem uma pintura ou escultura (de boa qualidade, já se vê), mas que esteja dentro dos cânones estéticos e do gosto predominante na atualidade em seus próprios meios, aprioristicamente considerados mais adiantados ou pelo menos mais sofisticados, ou então alguma coisa autóctone. Entendem, porém, por autóctone tudo que indique primitivismo, romantismo, selvagismo, isto é, no fundo, exotismo²⁵.

Ousamos dizer que, para Pedrosa, Barr representava, naquele momento, a tal crítica estrangeira a que se refere. Além disso, parece-nos que a interpretação do crítico brasileiro está bastante próxima do que de fato buscava Barr durante o evento.

As gafes de Barr

O depoimento que Alfred Barr Jr. concedeu a um jornalista do Suplemento Literário do jornal *O Estado de S. Paulo*²⁶ desencadeou a discussão inflamada de Pedrosa e Gomes Machado, este, na época, responsável pela página de artes plásticas do Suplemento. O tom geral do depoimento não é de crítica hostil ou desaprovação completa da Bienal, pelo contrário, Barr mostra-se compreensivo, por exemplo, em relação às dificuldades de premiação de um evento desse porte. Porém, além da declaração francamente ácida sobre os “exercícios bauhausianos” dos concretos – a razão da ira de Pedrosa –, Barr confessa-se completamente desavisado em relação à polêmica causada por sua compra de duas pinturas de Flávio de Carvalho no salão dos rejeitados. Carvalho era justamente um dos maiores contestadores dos critérios do júri desse ano. É claro que sua atitude foi lida pelos insatisfeitos com a seleção, que deixou

muitos artistas renomados de fora – como o próprio Carvalho –, como apoio aos rejeitados e oposição ao júri de seleção. Durante as revoltas contra as escolhas do júri – que recusou 86% dos artistas na totalidade de obras e 16% parcialmente – Carvalho havia afirmado que o concretismo era algo “há muito tempo superado na Europa”, concepção muito próxima daquela de Barr. Waldemar Cordeiro, líder do Ruptura²⁷, retrucaria: Carvalho nunca havia se disposto a “discutir” o concretismo com os artistas que seguiam essa tendência²⁸.

Barr declara-se alheio a esses problemas. É impossível saber se de fato o crítico norte-americano estava ou não a par das controvérsias envolvendo o júri da Bienal, mas é interessante notar sua predileção pelos desenhos de Carvalho, cuja produção mais sempre fora bastante diversificada, abarcando retratos, performance, peças de teatro, projetos de arquitetura, entre outros. Barr afirma ter comprado ainda outras obras de artistas que não participavam do referido salão.

Incomodou-o sobretudo a representação brasileira de fato reduzida em relação aos anos anteriores²⁹. Sua intenção era conhecer melhor a produção local e, segundo ele, isso lhe foi negado por uma representação pequena e a ausência da coleção do Museu de Arte Moderna que se encontrava fora do país nesse momento. Para Barr, o desenho e a gravura brasileiros – lá representados por Fernando Lemos, Wegia Nery, Fayga Ostrower e Hansen Bahia, entre outros – eram superiores à pintura – esta em grande parte representada pelos concretos – Waldemar Cordeiro, Lothar Charoux e o grupo Frente³⁰: Ivan Serpa, Lygia Clark, Ligia Pape e Helio Oiticica, entre outros. O concretismo é lido por Barr, como mencionado, como movimento ultrapassado e, assim sendo, sem maior importância, embora o jornalista tente alertá-lo de que, do ponto de vista da arte brasileira, o concretismo havia se tornado manifestação relevante após a vinda de Max Bill, durante a 1ª Bienal, e os esforços de Pedrosa no sentido de apoiar o movimento. Mesmo assim, Barr demonstra interesse apenas pela pintura de Frans Krajcberg³¹, à

época informal, bem como a de Flavio Shiró, que também participa dessa Bienal e nem é mencionado pelo crítico estadunidense. Afinal, um de seus critérios de avaliação das obras era a contemporaneidade da produção artística, ele próprio acompanhando a mostra de Pollock que se tornou retrospectiva póstuma, mas foi inicialmente pensada pela MoMA como parte de uma série de mostras individuais de artistas na maturidade de suas carreiras³². Resta-nos então a questão: por que o expressionismo de Pollock era suficientemente contemporâneo enquanto que o informalismo dos brasileiros não merecia devido exame?

Considerações finais

Entendendo o esforço de Alfred Barr Jr. por expandir o território de aceitação da arte moderna e garantir seu espaço em instituições públicas por meio da conquista de um público permanente, é possível dizer que sua presença no Brasil e sua relação com a arte brasileira faziam parte desse objetivo maior. Sua posição relativamente autoritária em relação às manifestações concretas se explica, provavelmente, porque estariam estas em “atraso” em relação às manifestações dessa ordem que ocorreram em outros países -- afinal, o concretismo já não era foco do debate internacional e, para ele, era absolutamente indispensável que se acompanhasse o desenvolvimento da arte – note-se que o objetivo último de um museu de arte moderna, em sua concepção, era mostrar o que havia de mais recente e radical dentro do registro das manifestações modernas. Trabalhos que perdiam sua atualidade, por exemplo, inicialmente eram repassados por meio de venda ao Museu Metropolitan, que os incorporava à sua coleção, mais diversificada em termos cronológicos³³.

Talvez sem sabê-lo, talvez em plena consciência de seus atos, ao escolher incluir em seu livro *Que é a Pintura Moderna?* (1953) artistas legitimados pela história da arte brasileira – Guignard, Portinari, Segall, além de Heitor dos Prazeres – Barr acaba

apoiando um discurso oficial local que entende esses nomes em termos de modernismo na arte brasileira. Essa visão é absolutamente compatível com sua predileção pelos trabalhos de Flavio de Carvalho que, apesar de não ser incluído no grupo anterior, tratava-se também de um artista já renomado, embora de atitudes mais ousadas – mais vanguardistas inclusive – do que os demais elencados. O caso de Prazeres aparentemente diverso, na realidade, integra o quesito “primitivismo” dentro da noção do crítico estadunidense de uma arte moderna formada por múltiplas manifestações.

Além disso, sua predileção explícita, durante a Bienal, pela pintura de Franz Krajcberg – que nesse ano é o premiado como melhor pintor nacional – alinha-se à mostra de Pollock, uma vez que o artista brasileiro nesse momento trabalha no registro da abstração gestual. Nesse aspecto, a posição de Barr parece confirmar a observação de Pedrosa, que escreve:

A atual Bienal está consagrada ao *tachisme* e o pensamento implícito ou explícito do Júri Internacional de premiação foi confirmá-lo. E seu fervor manchista foi de tal ordem que se sente o deliberado menosprezo com que passou pela sala de nossa pintura, sem se deter diante dos nomes mais consagrados dela. Fingiram não ver Volpi, fingiram não ver Milton Dacosta³⁴.

O desinteresse generalizado dos críticos internacionais por Volpi e Dacosta, cujas produções dialogavam com a abstração geométrica, indicam uma falta de generosidade para com as questões da arte brasileira do período, como releva o próprio Barr em seu menosprezo pela produção concreta. Quanto à presença excessiva do tachismo, entendido como abstração informal, criticada por Pedrosa, esta poderia ser um ponto de discussão entre ele e Gomes Machado, sendo que este último, por esses anos, já demonstrava predileção por essa tendência.

De qualquer modo, parece que Barr estava na contramão tanto da produção e como da crítica brasileiras desse período. Além disso, as reivindicações do crítico norte-

americano chegavam em hora inadequada quando, além de Pedrosa, Gomes Machado, entre outros críticos, lutavam para renovar a cena artística brasileira por meio da inclusão do abstracionismo de várias vertentes, pois

a arte brasileira já não podia permanecer confinada à apologética complacência dos tempos heróicos da batalha em prol da implantação do modernismo. (...) Houve mesmo, em determinado momento, a franca proposição de que conservássemos um mau nível, desde que nosso nível é mesmo mau, numa inesperada versão desses nacionalismos epidérmicos tão em moda e que, agora, se fixavam num insólito “o ruim é nosso”... Tudo isso, contudo, ao menos para uso pessoal, lancei à conta de um choque entre duas velhas cargas psico coletivas: de um lado, a inércia anticrítica, que se comprazia com a conquista definitiva de posições inabaláveis, e de outra parte a deprimente impressão, acumulada todos os dias mas bem visível cada dois anos, que resultava da seção brasileira das sucessivas Bienais, onde se multiplicavam os felizes detentores de “cadeiras cativas” do nosso pacaembuzinho artístico³⁵.

A batalha pela revitalização do meio artístico seria levada ao limite por Gomes Machado como jurado de seleção e premiação, a ponto de deixar de fora desta Bienal artistas reconhecidos – e já estabelecidos dentro de uma “oficialidade” da arte local – e apostar em jovens promissores, grande parte deles, em pleno diálogo com a abstração, tanto geométrica como informal, ou de formas abstratizantes. Pedrosa e Gomes Machado buscavam o alinhamento da produção pela universalidade ³⁶ ; Barr procurava manifestações que compusessem a multiplicidade, para ele fundamental, que constituía a arte moderna, mas que ele próprio não soubera ver na produção brasileira de fins da década de 1950.

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¹ Para Gomes Machado, a mostra de escultura seria a grande novidade artística do evento.

² C.A., “Conversa com Alfred Barr Jr.”, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, Set. 28, 1957, Suplemento Literário.

³ Importante observar que Gomes Machado assume o cargo de diretor em 1949.

⁴ Prazeres foi “descoberto” durante os anos 1950, premiado na I Bienal, em 1951, e recebeu sala especial na seguinte. Portinari, por sua vez, é um nome significativo, pois possuía já nesse momento obras na coleção do MoMA e murais em Nova York e Washington.

⁵ Sabe-se da relação entre Nelson Rockefeller, Alfred Barr Jr. e a fundação do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM-SP), que teria recebido obras quando do início da formação de sua coleção. Entretanto, neste trabalho buscamos nos ater apenas aos registros críticos de Barr, sobretudo, porque a atuação de um diretor de museu em termos de escolhas para a coleção se refere em grande parte ao seu olhar, porém conjuga-se aos desejos dos *trustees* e de outros interessados que compõem a estrutura do museu, que são muitas vezes, determinantes para as escolhas da coleção. Sobre a fundação do MAM-SP, ver: R. T. Barros, “Revisão de uma História: a criação do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo – 1946-1949” (Dissertação de mestrado, ECA-USP, 2002).

⁶ Aliás, é preciso lembrar ainda que é no contexto dessa Bienal que se configura a criação do Prêmio Leirner de Arte Contemporânea, organizado por Isai Leirner, diretor-tesoureiro do Museu de Arte Moderna. Essa premiação, pelo menos no início, visava sobretudo mostrar os trabalhos dos figurativistas excluídos da seleção oficial da mostra. Agradeço Ana Cristina Montenegro por essa referência.

⁷ Alfred Barr Jr. é diretor do MoMA entre 1929 a 1943, quando é afastado do cargo. Porém, a partir de 1947, torna-se diretor de coleções por 20 anos. Essa função será desempenhada em diálogo direto com o diretor, René D'Hannoncourt, com que virá para São Paulo em 1957.

⁸ Mario Pedrosa, "Pintura brasileira e gosto internacional", in *Acadêmicos e Modernos*, Mario Pedrosa (São Paulo: Edusp, 2004), p. 280.

Peter Blume (1906 – 1992) foi um pintor figurativo russo criado nos EUA, surrealista tardio ou realista mágico, que se lançou nas artes entre 1930 e 1940, obtendo significativo sucesso em Nova Iorque. Peter Blume, "The Collection", MoMA, <http://www.moma.org>. Blume é mencionado por Barr no catálogo do Museu de 1948 e em mais de uma edição de *What Is Modern Painting?*, incluindo a brasileira.

⁹ Alfred H. Barr Jr., *Que é a pintura moderna?* (Nova York/São Paulo/Rio de Janeiro: MoMA/MAM-SP/MAM-RJ, 1953), 39.

¹⁰ Segundo Sybil Gordon Kantor, Barr seguia os pressupostos formalistas do crítico inglês Roger Fry: "Fry's empirical analysis of 'the very stuff of the painting', of coming to grips 'with the actual material of his paintings', expressed a habit that would rule Barr's life and career. Barr, like Fry, spoke of the planes of light reproduced by planes of color and the inner reality accomplished by the composition of those colors". Ela completa ainda: "Still Barr's formalist descriptions when viewed in their totality at times approach a lyrical understanding. (...) Ignoring biography, the contingency of history, and the pressure of influences, Barr accounted for the twists and turns of Picasso's stylistic changes by the pre-conceptual 'genius' of the artist. This intuition of Barr's was a belief that became a method. It insisted that the work of art was autonomous and that the ideals of 'freedom', 'truth', and perfection were its fundamental enfranchisement.". Sybil Gordon Kantor, *Alfred Barr Jr. and The Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art*, (Cambridge, USA: MIT Press, 2002), 217; 345.

¹¹ Apesar de muitas vezes Barr levar em consideração o "temperamento" do artista. "Comparando estes dois quadros [um de Braque e outro de Léger] podemos ver como numa tela cubista, exatamente como numa obra de música ou de arquitetura, o temperamento do artista se revela; como todo elemento se conjuga em harmonia íntegra, altamente individual e particular.". Alfred H. Barr Jr., *O que é a pintura moderna?* (Nova York/São Paulo/Rio de Janeiro: MoMA/MAM-SP/MAM-RJ, 1953), 33.

¹² Idem, 366.

¹³ Idem, 367.

¹⁴ Nelson Rockefeller era coordenador do Gabinete de Assuntos Inter-Americanos quando Roosevelt o criou em 1940, visando aprimorar relações culturais, científicas e educacionais (deixou seu cargo de diretor do MoMA, desde 1939, em 1941 para assumir esse cargo). Rockefeller abriu seções de cinema, rádio e imprensa. Além de grupos de balé, o OIAA cuidava também de exposições que deveriam viajar para a América Latina, incluindo a *Brazil Builds* em 1943. Zilah Quezada Deccker, *Brazil Built: the Architecture of the Modern Movement in Brazil*, London/New York: Spon Press, 2001), 100.

Segundo Barros, é Barr quem leva Rockefeller a criar esse fundo para aquisições de obras latino-americanas. BARROS, "Revisão de uma História: a criação do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo – 1946-1949", 45. Observamos que as obras brasileiras reproduzidas no livro de Barr, com exceção de *Morro*, foram adquiridas por meio desse Fundo.

¹⁵ Segundo Deccker, esta mostra visitou a Cidade do México, Havana, Caracas, Bogotá, Quito, Lima, Rio de Janeiro, Santiago, Montevidéu e Buenos Aires. DECCKER, *Brazil Built: the Architecture of the Modern Movement in Brazil*, 108.

¹⁶ Idem.

¹⁷ Alguns eixos serão repetidos no catálogo posterior *Painting and Sculpture in the Museum of Modern Art: 1929-1967*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1942.

¹⁸ Ver, por exemplo, o diagrama da arte abstrata em: Eric Fernie, *Art History and Its Methods*, New York/London: Phaidon, 1995, 180.

¹⁹ KANTOR, *Alfred Barr Jr. and The Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art*, 241.

²⁰ Obra de Guignard na coleção do MoMA: *Ouro Preto*, 1942.

²¹ Os trabalhos de Segall possuíam alguma projeção internacional, certamente maior do que a de Guignard. Sua obra figurou na *Exhibition of Modern Brazilian Paintings*, durante a segunda metade de 1940, que percorreu o Reino Unido. Em 1948, ele teria uma individual em Nova York, na Associated American Artists Galleries e em Washington: *Paintings by Lasar Segall*, na Pan American Union. Guignard participa da mesma exposição de pintura moderna brasileira. Entretanto, a projeção de Portinari dada pelo MoMA era infinitamente maior.

²² Alfred H. Barr Jr., *Que é a pintura moderna?* (Nova York/São Paulo/Rio de Janeiro: MoMA/MAM-SP/MAM-RJ, 1953), 11.

²³ Aliás, Gomes Machado comentou em um artigo de jornal de 1944: “não teríeis o mau gosto de tentar descobrir nele [Heitor dos Prazeres] influências do Douannier Rousseau”, respondendo a um norte-americano que reivindicava uma pintura “brasileira” num suplemento de *A Manhã*, sob responsabilidade de Cassiano Ricardo. Gomes Machado indica que a presença de Ricardo é igualmente mau sinal certamente fazendo referência ao nacionalismo ufanista desse poeta que havia participado, nos anos 1920, dos grupos Anta e Verde-amarelismo. Lourival Gomes Machado, “Carta”, *Folha da Manhã*, Outubro 11, 1944.

²⁴ A obra de Prazeres na coleção do MoMA é *Dia de S. João*, 1942.

²⁵ Idem.

²⁶ C.A., “Conversa com Alfred Barr Jr.”, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, Setembro 28, 1957, Suplemento Literário.

²⁷ O grupo Ruptura foi formado em 1952 por Waldemar Cordeiro, Lothar Charoux, Geraldo de Barros, Anatol Wladyslaw, Kazmer Féjer, Leopold Haar e Luís Sacilotto que propunham uma produção não-figurativa, coletiva, geométrica e racional e de viés concreto.

²⁸ “Novo tumulto no Museu de Arte Moderna promovido contra o júri da IV Bienal”, *Diário de S. Paulo*, São Paulo, Maio 29, 1957.

²⁹ Outro aspecto bastante interessante mencionado pelo jornalista é a lista, que Barr tem em mãos enquanto conversam, cujo conteúdo são obras e artistas indicados para aquisição ao MoMA a partir de sua estada no Brasil. Apesar de não serem revelados os nomes listados, a reclamação de Barr em relação ao parco acesso dos estrangeiros a artistas brasileiros demonstra seu interesse em conhecer melhor a arte brasileira indicando, provavelmente, futuras aquisições.

³⁰ Formado por ex-alunos do pintor Ivan Serpa, o grupo Frente inaugura sua primeira exposição em 1954, no Rio de Janeiro, com apresentação do crítico Ferreira Gullar. A proposta do grupo é abstrato-geométrica e concreta em oposição ao figurativismo moderno de raiz nacionalista.

³¹ “Muitos diagramas concretistas e pouco do resto. Essa é a razão pela qual nós, os membros estrangeiros do júri internacional, gostamos de Krajcberg. Ele sobressai entre outros porque não faz diagramas”. C.A., “Conversa com Alfred Barr Jr.”, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, Set. 28, 1957, Suplemento Literário.

³² Para saber mais sobre a relação entre Pollock e o MoMA: Jackson Pollock, MoMA, www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/1998/pollock/website100/chronology.html.

³³ Segundo Kantor, “Barr intended to use the arrangement that the Musée de Luxembourg had with the Louvre of selling off the older paintings to the Metropolitan in order to purchase the latest art.” Ela cita ainda um trecho de uma carta que Barr escreve a Sachs, seu ex-professor e conselheiro: “The Word ‘modern’ is valuable because semantically it suggests the progressive, original and challenging rather than the safe and academic which would naturally be included in the supine neutrality of the term ‘contemporary’”. KANTOR, *Alfred Barr Jr. and The Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art*, 366. Esse entendimento entre as instituições nova-iorquinas prosperou até 1953, quando o MoMA decidiu formar uma coleção de obras-primas.

³⁴ Pedrosa, “Pintura brasileira e gosto internacional”, 280.

³⁵ Lourival Gomes Machado, “Conversa de Barr”, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, Outubro 19, 1957, Suplemento Literário.

³⁶ Desde a primeira metade de 1940, Gomes Machado já anunciava sua posição: “A pintura brasileira, ninguém ainda sabe o que ao certo é. Uma coisa, contudo, é negável – a sua raiz européia”. Lourival Gomes Machado, “Carta”, *Folha da Manhã*, Outubro 11, 1944.

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ABSTRACT
English / Spanish

Between Regionalism and Internationalism: Definitions of Latin American Art at the 1985 São Paulo International Biennale

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In a setting permeated by postmodernist discourses, the 18th São Paulo International Biennale of Art was presented as a large exhibition in complete agreement with the “universal phenomenon” of neo-expressionistic languages. Nevertheless, this new canon erected by the critics’ central accounts was confronted, although not necessarily refuted, by the presence of images which cracked the proclaimed homogeneity of their poetics. In this respect, the analysis of both the discourses and the images with their exhibition devices at the Biennale presents a complex scene where regional situations and “identity” questions –reactualized within the context of the Southern Cone’s transitions to democracy– acted as a counteroffensive with respect to international models.

Characterizing this event as fertile ground for transnational exchanges and heated debate, this presentation aims to discuss the strategies to redefine and reposition Latin American art which came into play at the dawn of what would come to be called the globalization era. Whether Latin American art should be defined in terms of its cultural affinities and as different from the rest of the world, or, instead, in terms of its own internal differences and disparities was one of the main points reflected upon throughout the 1985 show.

Among the issues addressed, the case of the Argentinean participation in the Biennale will be central, due to the extraordinarily busy activity in which the Argentinean representatives were involved and also because the analysis of the participating works of art will articulate the tensions between the regionalist and internationalist conceptions defining this meeting.

ESPAÑOL

Entre el regionalismo y el internacionalismo: Definiciones del Arte Latinoamericano en la Bienal Internacional de San Pablo de 1985

Dr Viviana Usubiaga
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En un escenario permeado por los discursos de la postmodernidad, la 18ª Bienal Internacional de Arte de San Pablo de 1985 se presentó como una gran exposición en absoluta consonancia con el “fenómeno universal” de los lenguajes neoexpresionistas.

Sin embargo, este nuevo canon erigido desde los relatos centrales de la crítica se vio confrontado por la presencia de imágenes que, sin refutarlos necesariamente, al menos resquebrajaban la anunciada homogeneidad de las poéticas. A partir del análisis de los discursos, las imágenes y sus dispositivos de exhibición desplegados en este evento fecundo en intercambios transnacionales y acalorados debates, el trabajo propone discutir sobre las estrategias de redefinición y reposicionamiento del arte latinoamericano que se pusieron en juego en los albores de la mentada era de la globalización. Será central el caso del envío argentino a la bienal porque permite articular las tensiones entre las concepciones regionalistas e internacionalistas que delinearon aquel encuentro.

ENGLISH shorter version / SPANISH full version

*Between Regionalism and Internationalism:
Definitions of Latin American Art
at the 1985 São Paulo International Biennale¹*

**Viviana Usubiaga, PhD
Universidad de Buenos Aires**

Translated by Viviana Werber

1. Since it was created in 1951, the São Paulo Biennale has been an international artistic meeting granting privileged visibility to art *of* and *from* Latin America. The 1985 Biennale coincided with a highly significant moment in history, filled with a particular kind of tension for Latin American art and its uneven relations with the international artistic circle.

In a setting permeated by postmodernist discourses, the 18th São Paulo International Biennale of Art was presented as a large exhibition in complete agreement with the “universal phenomenon” of neo-expressionistic languages. Nevertheless, this new canon erected by the critics’ central accounts was confronted, although not necessarily refuted, by the presence of images which cracked the proclaimed homogeneity of their poetics. In this respect, the analysis of both the discourses and the images with their exhibition devices at the Biennale presents a complex scene where regional situations and “identity” questions –reactualized within the context of the Southern Cone’s transitions to democracy– acted as a counteroffensive with respect to international models.

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Among the issues addressed, the case of the Argentinean participation in the Biennale will be central, due to the extraordinarily busy activity in which the Argentinean representatives were involved and also because the analysis of the participating works of art will articulate the tensions between the regionalist and internationalist conceptions defining this meeting.

¹ This presentation is based on a more extensive piece of research included in my doctoral thesis on visual arts in Buenos Aires in the 1980s, submitted to the University of Buenos Aires in 2008, and directed by Dr Andrea Giunta and by Prof Cecilia Hidalgo. I was aided in the writing of my thesis by a doctoral grant from the National Council for Scientific and Technological Research (CONICET). My participation at 1st International Research Forum for Graduate Students and Emerging Scholars, University of Texas, Austin, 2009, was supported by Telefónica Foundation from Argentina.

2. The 18th São Paulo International Biennale of Art took place between October 4 and December 15, 1985. Four hundred and ninety-eight artists from forty-six countries participated in this biennale, with a total of one thousand six hundred and seventy-four works. The biennale was laid out in separate architectural areas: a *Historic* nucleus, a *Contemporary* nucleus, ten additional exhibitions, and a sector known as the *Large Canvas*.

General curator Sheila Leirner's exhibition project aimed at the expression of a perfect synchrony within artistic production in the whole world, marked by neo-expressionism. Although Leirner was against the event becoming a showcase for foreign art as a "model for production by underdeveloped countries," some of her strategies to achieve the exchange and integration of the works in that "universal system" ended up producing the opposite effect -- they led to stereotyping production by the 1980s "younger generation" as mesmerized by Italian Trans-Avant-Garde or by German Wild Painting.

Leirner established a mounting design according to analogies among the languages of the works of art, instead of following the traditional layout according to country of origin. In other words, she tried to open dialogs among contemporary images from various regions as well as to create an area where postmodern expressions could be assessed. Her best bet in this respect was the sector devoted to what she called the *Large Canvas*: an exhibition design of three long corridors with dozens of paintings with no personal or national author identification, intending to make all art --whether it be Latin American, European or North American-- equal, by expressing a conception which overcame the barriers of time and space. Her experiment turned out to be one of the most vigorously rejected projects. Many critics --and also the participating artists themselves, who came to call it "death row"-- considered her peculiar staging to be detrimental to the appreciation of the works of art and to have no value as a whole. Moreover, Leirner's project was not consented to by other curators. Although the paintings were supposed to be mixed together, and mountings were not to be done by national shipment, all the works by Argentinean artists were hung together separately, at the end of the corridor.

In this edition of the Biennale, the Argentinean delegation included the largest number of artists in the American continent, second only to the local group, which consisted of one hundred and fifteen artists. As the paper specifies, the mounting of the Argentinean shipment had a few peculiarities. At first, Jorge Glusberg, director of CAYC (Art and Communication Center) and president of the Argentinean Association of Art Critics, was appointed curator. His project was to exhibit the *Nueva Imagen* --made up in this case by Juan José Cambre, Ana Eckell, Fernando Fazzolari, Guillermo Kuitca, Alfredo Prior, Armando Rearte, Juan Pablo Renzi, and Pablo Suárez-- in the contemporary area², and an exhibition by *La Nueva Figuración* (Luis Felipe Noe, Rómulo Macció, Ernesto Deira, Jorge de la Vega) in the historic sector as a precursor of the *Nueva Imagen*. As the Biennale's opening date neared, the Argentinean Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to choose one more artist as the country's official representative, in addition to Glusberg and his curatorial project. Alejandro Puente then completed the name list for the Biennale's Argentinean delegation.³ The addition of his work helped expand the projection of Argentina's artistic output and its presence in a favored area on the pavilion's ground floor, and undermined an esthetic discourse which intended to stick to an interpretation akin to that of the Biennale's general curatorship, and similarly ambiguous. Whereas the exhibition curated by Glusberg articulated both historic and contemporary works by Argentinean artists into a single, "internationalistic" direction,

² The term "Nueva Imagen" was in fact translated literally from the title *New Image Painting*, under which Richard Marshall made an exhibition at the New York Whitney Museum of American Art in late 1978. Although some *New Image* features can be seen in the works by the Argentinean artists selected, Glusberg's discursive formation was linked more specifically with Achille Bonito Oliva's theoretical output and his *Italian Trans-Avant-Garde* rather than with its contemporary, homonymous American curatorial project.

³ Horacio Hugo Torcello, letter to Sheila Leirner, May 29, 1985, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo Archives.

the presence of some works explicitly connected with the contemporary rethinking of pre-Hispanic forms, such as Puente's, brought a kind of "regionalistic" assertion of identity. His exhibition can thus be thought of as a suitable counterpoint to the esthetic debates that took place.

3. If we agree with Ernesto Laclau that "the universal is nothing but a particular that has become dominant at a given time,"⁴ we can notice that the "universalist view" which the 18th Biennale's staging called upon was dominated by the particular discursive formations of a group of supporters of Italian, German and American art that in turn related to the very market dynamics that they had set up. In fact, some of the Latin American critics seemed to "ruminate" again and again on those discourses which appeared, more or less literalized, in the event's exhibition and text rhetoric. The positions which emerged in dichotomous terms between universalism / Latin Americanism, and internationalism / regionalism stemmed from old debates among the critics of Latin American art and seemed to resume some issues already solved in past years.⁵ Broadly speaking, it could be said that, if a so-called internationalist project was developed in the 60s⁶, and a retreat towards the "utopia of Latin American art autonomy" took place in the 70s⁷, then fluctuations between these two models are seen in the 80s.

Even though curator Sheila Leirner had sought to get rid of national niches, her ecumenical project for visual arts within postmodern culture crashed in its own feasibility. On the one hand, the hegemony of the "motherlands" of the latent models of *Italian* trans-avant-garde, *German* neo-expressionism and *American* new image continued to operate with unquestionable power in the art system. On the other hand, regionalisms kept coming out onto the surfaces which were making an effort to become even.⁸ In each and every review, as well as in the design of the catalog as yet another exhibition device, divisions into countries did not disappear but remained a code for sorting views on the Biennale. In other words, a "de-territorialized" mode for the art system was far from plausible.⁹

Almost twenty years later, Leirner regarded her 1985 curatorship as anticipatory of the mediations by arts critics and by the globalized flow of images in the 21st century (such as the Internet).¹⁰ However, her attempt to open dialogs among contemporary works of art resulted to some extent in a soliloquy difficult to understand. In order to make the exhibition "truly international," staging it without frontiers in the exhibition venue was not enough. Following Ticio Escobar, instead of developing exhibition strategies aimed at "exceptionalizing" the works of art in order to strengthen their individual positions and to call for being looked at, the works were

⁴ Ernesto Laclau, "Universalismo, particularismo y la cuestión de la identidad," *Emancipación y diferencia* (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1996), 53.

⁵ Fabiana Serviddio analyzed the impact of the crisis of the *universalist model* as a tool for establishing the artistic status of Latin American art in the 1970s in her article "La crítica de arte en América Latina: entre el modelo universalista y el latinoamericanista." In *Discutir el canon. Tradiciones y valores en crisis*, various authors (Buenos Aires: Centro Argentino de Investigadores de Arte, 2003), 89-100. On a "new era for art criticism in Latin America" in the late 1970s, see also Néstor García Canclini's analysis of 1978's First São Paulo Latin American Biennale of Art. Néstor García Canclini, "¿Uso artístico de los mitos o uso mítico del arte? A propósito de la Bienal de San Pablo." In *Punto de Vista*, year II, no. 6 (July 1979): 35-38.

⁶ Cf. Andrea Giunta, *Vanguardia, internacionalismo y política* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2001).

⁷ Fabiana Serviddio, *op. cit.*, 93.

⁸ Laura Buccellato. "La reciente Bienal de San Pablo", *Artinf*, year 11, no. 56/57, Buenos Aires (Fall 1986): 12.

⁹ A growing "deterritorialized" mode, such as García Canclini identified several years later in the creation, circulation and reception of art. See Néstor García Canclini, "Rehacer los pasaportes. El pensamiento visual en el debate sobre multiculturalidad." In Gustavo Curiel, Renato González Mello and Juana Gutiérrez Haces, eds. *Arte, Historia e Identidad en América Visiones comparativas* (México: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1994), 1001-1009.

¹⁰ Sheila Leirner, "Uma geração que pertence ao presente" in Marcus de Londra Costa, *Onde está você, Geração 80?*, in exhibition catalogue (Rio de Janeiro: Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, 2004, 74-75).

forced into the rule, into the visual canon established by central metropolises in an age of rapid changes-- Changes whose results would be seen later in the region's theoretical output, and the demand for which was created around the 1985 Biennale.

In a word, the conditions of possibility started to be created in those years for critical output *from* and *about* Latin America to develop its arguments not in reductionist, dichotomous terms any more, but pointing to shifts and transgressions with respect to central models¹¹ as well as to principles of interaction in transnational terms. And this forum is an eloquent example.

¹¹ Ticio Escobar, "Modernidades paralelas" in Asunción, FONDEC – CAV/Museo del Barro, 2004In *op. cit.*, 21.

*Entre el regionalismo y el internacionalismo:
Definiciones del Arte Latinoamericano
en la Bienal Internacional de San Pablo de 1985¹²*

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A primeira preocupação com relação á 18ª Bienal Internacional de São Paulo foi entender que o que torna esta exposição verdadeiramente internacional não é o fato de ella agrupar países. É sim a consciência de que ela se insere no sistema universal de arte.

Sheila Leirner, curadora general de la Bienal de San Pablo, 1985¹³

¿Cómo hablar de lo propio si el repertorio es de nombres prestados?

Nelly Richard¹⁴

Introducción

Entre los encuentros artísticos internacionales, la Bienal de San Pablo ha logrado construir, desde su fundación en 1951, un lugar privilegiado de visibilidad del arte *de y desde* América latina. La edición de 1985 coincidió con un momento histórico altamente significativo y de singular tensión en el rumbo del arte latinoamericano y sus dispares relaciones con el circuito artístico internacional.

En un escenario permeado por los discursos de la postmodernidad, la 18ª Bienal Internacional de Arte de San Pablo se presentó como una gran exposición en absoluta consonancia con el “fenómeno universal” de los lenguajes neoexpresionistas. Sin embargo, este nuevo canon erigido desde los relatos centrales de la crítica se vio confrontado por la presencia de imágenes que, sin refutarlos necesariamente, al menos resquebrajaban la anunciada homogeneidad de las poéticas. En este sentido, el análisis tanto de los discursos como de las imágenes y sus dispositivos de exhibición despliegan una escena compleja donde las problemáticas regionales y las cuestiones

¹² Este artículo está basado en una investigación mayor que forma parte de mi tesis doctoral sobre las artes visuales en Buenos Aires en los años '80, aprobada por la Universidad de Buenos Aires en 2008, dirigida por la Dra. Andrea Giunta y la Prof. Cecilia Hidalgo. Para la escritura de mi tesis obtuve una beca de doctorado del Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET). Mi participación en el 1st International Research Forum for Graduate Students and Emerging Scholars, University of Texas, Austin, 2009, fue gracias a la ayuda de la Fundación Telefónica de Argentina.

¹³ Sheila Leirner, “Uma visão universalista”, en AA. VV., *18ª Bienal de Arte de San Paulo*, cat. exp., São Paulo, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 1985. p. 13.

¹⁴ Nelly Richard, “Latinoamérica y la Posmodernidad”, en Hermann Herlinghaus y Mónica Walter (eds.), *Posmodernidad en la periferia. Enfoques latinoamericanos de la nueva teoría cultural*, Berlín, Langer Verlag, 1994, p. 211.

de “identidad” –reinscriptas en el contexto de los procesos de transición democrática en el Cono Sur– actuaron como contraofensiva de los modelos internacionales.

A partir de la caracterización de este evento como un lugar fecundo de intercambios transnacionales y acalorados debates, este trabajo propone discutir sobre las estrategias de redefinición y reposicionamiento del arte latinoamericano que se pusieron en juego en los albores de la mentada era de la globalización. Si el arte latinoamericano debía definirse por sus afinidades culturales y en oposición al resto del mundo o si, por el contrario, se requería hacerlo marcando la diversidad y desigualdades que ella misma albergaba fue uno de los principales asuntos de reflexión durante la edición de 1985.

En particular, el caso del envío argentino a la bienal es significativo por el inusual despliegue de actividades en las que los representantes de ese país se vieron involucrados y porque el análisis de algunas de las obras que lo conformaron permite articular las tensiones entre las concepciones regionalistas e internacionalistas que delinearon aquel encuentro.

Programa curatorial de la 18° Bienal Internacional de San Pablo

La 18° Bienal Internacional de San Pablo (en adelante BISP) se llevó a cabo entre el 4 de octubre y el 15 de diciembre de 1985. Participaron 498 artistas de 46 países con un total de 1674 obras. Estuvo organizada en áreas arquitectónicas diferenciadas: un núcleo *Histórico*, un núcleo *Contemporáneo*, una decena de muestras complementarias y un sector que se conoció como la *Gran Tela*.

Su concepción subrayaba una “visión universalista”, bajo el título-consigna: *El hombre y la vida*, que se proponía como superadora de las fronteras de tiempo y espacio. La curadora general, la crítica Sheila Leirner, tenía por objetivo integrar la Bienal a “um processo político, social e intelectual que –desde la Primera Guerra Mundial– vem dissolvendo as tradições locais, regionais e nacionais, que são absorvidas cada vez mais pelos amplos sistemas universais.”¹⁵ De sus palabras en el texto programático del catálogo se desprende su convicción sobre la existencia de una absoluta sincronía en la producción artística del mundo entero. Si bien rechazaba la idea de que el evento se convirtiera en la vidriera de lo que se hacía en el exterior como “modelo para la producción de los países subdesarrollados”, algunas de sus estrategias para lograr el intercambio e integración de las obras en aquel “sistema universal” terminaron por facilitar el efecto contrario: dieron lugar al encasillamiento de la producción de la “joven generación” de los años ochenta como sometida a la fascinación por la Transvanguardia italiana o la Pintura Salvaje alemana.

Vacilaciones sobre la *Gran Tela* contemporánea

Leirner estableció un diseño de montaje por analogía de lenguaje de las obras en lugar de seguir la tradicional disposición de espacios expositivos por países. Es decir, intentaba establecer diálogos entre las imágenes contemporáneas de las distintas regiones y de generar un espacio para evaluar las manifestaciones posmodernas. Su mayor apuesta en este sentido fue el sector dedicado a lo que denominó la *Gran Tela*. Aquel sector era concebido como un ámbito “simbólico real” que agrupaba a la producción de la nueva pintura generando un “espaço perturbador, uma zona de turbulência, análoga àquela que encontramos na arte contemporânea.”¹⁶ Se trataba de tres corredores de 100 metros de largo cada uno donde se montaron decenas de pinturas una al lado de la otra. En efecto, la curadora se proponía testear en un modelo a escala la experiencia de

¹⁵ Sheila Leirner, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

emparentar toda la pintura producida en el mundo. Sin embargo, su experimento se convirtió en una de las propuestas más rechazadas dado que muchos críticos –e incluso los propios artistas participantes– consideraron que esa peculiar puesta en escena perjudicaba la apreciación de las obras y no tenía valor alguno en su conjunto. De algún modo, sí logró convertirse en una *zona de turbulencia* por lo encendido de las discusiones y malestares que despertó. La osadía de aquel montaje de Leirner anti-didáctico, anti-historicista y anárquico” doblaba la apuesta sobre las tareas que debía adjudicarse un curador. Su figura se convertía así en autor de aquella obra monumental conjugando los trabajos de los artistas, quienes comenzaron a llamar paródicamente a esos pasillos como “el corredor de la muerte”.

Su propuesta tampoco fue consensuada con otros de sus colegas curadores. A pesar de que la idea era mezclar las obras de todos los pintores por su analogía de lenguajes neoexpresionistas y, tal como se había estipulado, no se realizarían montajes por envíos nacionales, las obras de los artistas argentinos fueron colgadas todas juntas, aparte, al final del recorrido.

En esta edición de la BISP, la delegación argentina fue la más numerosa del continente americano, luego del conjunto de artistas locales que sumaban 115. Durante la organización, Leirner mantuvo una continua comunicación con los funcionarios del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de la Argentina y con el crítico Jorge Glusberg. En un principio, fue nombrado curador del envío argentino con su propuesta de exhibir en el área contemporánea a la *Nueva Imagen*¹⁷ – integrada en esta ocasión por Juan José Cambre, Ana Eckell, Fernando Fazzolari, Guillermo Kuitca, Alfredo Prior, Armando Rearte, Juan Pablo Renzi y Pablo Suárez– y en el sector histórico una muestra de *La Nueva Figuración* (Luis Felipe Noe, Rómulo Macció, Ernesto Deira, Jorge de la Vega) como antecedente de la antes mencionada...

Llegado el momento del montaje de la *Gran Tela*, Glusberg, se opuso a descomponer al grupo argentino y fusionarlo con el resto. Esto trajo a su vez malestar entre algunos de los artistas que creían que no se los consideraba a la altura para ser integrados entre los europeos. En definitiva, la propuesta era osada pero poco efectiva. Sobre ese mapeo figurado del universo del arte, sobre esas superficies pretendidamente homogeneizadoras, en rigor, lo que entre otras cosas se exponía eran las vacilaciones respecto de la configuración del lugar que Latinoamérica debía ocupar en el mundo y si la interacción del puro lenguaje de las formas era capaz de diluir las diferencias.

Críticas a una Bienal polémica

En una entrevista, el escultor brasileño Franz Krajcberg afirmaba: “Não há senso algum nesta mostra. Parece que a Brasil é só isto, que somos meros e maus copiadores da arte neo-expressionista alemã e americana.”¹⁸ Krajcberg se mostraba indignado ante un evento que exhibía a un continente que, en lugar de crear su propia imagen, se entregaba a los dictámenes de un mercado artístico europeo y norteamericano.

Desde argentina, el crítico Hugo Petruchansky aseguraba que:

Los países centrales, a partir de su peso en el área económica y de la regulación de la economía en el mercado artístico en particular, alientan un proceso de contaminación mercantilista mediante la venta de su propia imagen, a través de los canales a su disposición en el orden internacional. No obstante, la Nueva

¹⁷ El término “Nueva Imagen” era en efecto la traducción literal del título *New Image Painting*, nombre bajo el cual Richard Marshall presentó una exposición en el Whitney Museum of American Art de Nueva York a fines de 1978. Si bien algunos de los rasgos de la *New Image* pueden identificarse en la pintura de los argentinos seleccionados, la construcción discursiva de Glusberg se emparentó más específicamente con la producción teórica de Achille Bonito Oliva y su *Transvanguardia Italiana* que con aquel contemporáneo y homónimo proyecto curatorial norteamericano.

¹⁸ João Meirelles Filho, “Bienal. As Críticas e as propostas de Franz Krajcberg”, *Jornal da Tarde*, São Paulo, 16/10/1985.

Imagen, nos habla con claridad de un regionalismo crítico antes que de una retórica universalmente apta. Los problemas específicos de cada país se vierten a través del arte, y creemos que aquella venta de imagen aludida naufraga ante la constatación de que lo local tiene la misma validez que aquellas manifestaciones que se nos pretenden imponer.¹⁹

La cuestión radicaba entonces en definir esos problemas específicos haciendo pie en cada una de las imágenes que los artistas elaboraban y no meramente calcar los comentarios de los teóricos europeos. Más allá de enunciar que no se trataba de “copias”, ni “imitaciones”, los curadores parecían no estar dispuestos a avanzar en sus discursos sobre una reflexión que explicitara los genuinos contextos de producción de esas imágenes y así dejar en claro los fértiles “desajustes” que las obras producían respecto de los modelos centrales.²⁰ En consecuencia, sus narraciones se poblaron de aclaraciones y apelaciones retóricas a una cultura regional, a una problemática de Latinoamérica que, sin un trabajo de análisis profundo, poco a poco quedaba vaciada de sentidos. Paradójicamente, nuestro arte de tan “diferente” era igual al del mundo; de tan crítico apenas oponía resistencia al canon universal. Se buscaba así “naturalizar” las afinidades entre el arte de la región y el euronorteamericano. Por ejemplo, Glusberg insistía en el prólogo de su curaduría que la transvanguardia tapizaba el universo del arte que y “no tenía por qué faltar en Latinoamérica”. Precisamente como “no tenía que faltar”, se puso en marcha la maquinaria crítica para crearla y sostenerla en exhibiciones que replicaban sus fundamentos.

Estas construcciones, que podríamos caracterizar como “tics imitativos y réplicas enajenadas” –en términos de Nelly Richard²¹– fueron denunciadas contemporáneamente por algunos críticos que veían en ellas la afirmación, menos de un nuevo arte mundial, que del *lucro* como único patrón universal. Matinas Suzuki Jr. lamentaba que la curaduría de la BISP hubiera escogido ponerse en sintonía con el mercado, propiciando la oficialización museológica de lo que necesitaba el circuito de consumo del arte: el lanzamiento de nombres nuevos con obras de bajos precios.²²

En defensa de una *identidad* aún por definir

Los tiempos de cambios sociopolíticos vividos como momentos inaugurales –tal era el caso de la transición democrática que tanto Argentina como el Brasil estaban atravesando– son propicios para las preguntas fundantes y, en este sentido, pronunciarse acerca de las cuestiones de identidad parecía ineludible.

En las Jornadas Internacionales de la Crítica de 1984 organizadas en Buenos Aires se había redactado un documento titulado “Declaración de Buenos Aires. El artista y el intelectual como ciudadanos de países de nuestra América.”²³ Este mismo documento se adjuntó en la invitación – cursada por Glusberg y Horacio Safons, presidente y secretario de la Asociación Argentina de Críticos de Arte respectivamente– al coloquio “Hacia un circuito del arte latinoamericano”. El encuentro se llevó a cabo entre el 2 y 3 de octubre de 1985 en la Fundación Armando Álvarez Penteado en San Pablo, previo a la inauguración de la BISP. Figuraban como panelistas invitados:

¹⁹ Hugo Petrucchansky, “18ª Bienal de San Pablo: 2400 obras de arte reunidas”, *Le Monde Diplomatique en español*, Buenos Aires, noviembre 1985, p. 42.

²⁰ Tarea que ya se había comenzado a desarrollar sobre otros períodos de la historia del arte en América Latina. Véase Ticio Escobar, *El arte fuera de sí*, Asunción, FONDEC – CAV/Museo del Barro, 2004.

²¹ Nelly Richard, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

²² Matinas Suzuki Jr., “O retrô moderninho”, s/d, Archivo de la Fundação Bienal de São Paulo.

²³ Citado en la *Declaración de Buenos Aires*, Jornadas Internacionales de la Crítica, Buenos Aires, 1984. Archivo de la Fundação Bienal de São Paulo.

Juan Acha, Ticio Escobar, Carlos Espartaco, Fermín Fèvre, Ángel Kalenberg, Sheila Leirner, Bélgica Rodríguez, Ernesto Ruiz de la Matta y Eduardo Serrano. Entre los objetivos del encuentro se buscaba “concretar un plan de acción de la AGAL (Asociación de Gente de Arte Latinoamericano)”.²⁴

En aquel momento de reconstrucción de las tramas sociales postdictaduras se requería la creación de redes concretas y la elaboración de argumentos superadores de la invocación a discursos esencialistas y ahistóricos o a una determinación biológica que enlazaría una identidad común.²⁵ En este sentido, comenzaban a gestarse alianzas estratégicas tanto culturales como económicas y políticas.

Es significativo recordar aquí el viaje que el presidente argentino, Raúl Alfonsín, realizó a la frontera con Brasil –contemporáneamente al evento que nos ocupa– para reunirse con su par José Sarney.²⁶ En ese encuentro se formularon varios convenios que por su relevancia coyuntural lo definirían como una cumbre histórica y un paso hacia la integración de Latinoamérica.²⁷ Los acuerdos de cooperación firmados en la “Declaración de Iguazú” fueron considerados embrionarios del proyecto de unidad económica regional en un mercado común²⁸ que años más tarde encarnaría en el Mercosur. La prensa había anticipado que se preveía la creación de la Comunidad Económica Latinoamericana (CELA)²⁹ cuya aspiración era “construir un frente común para oponer al proteccionismo y discriminación comercial de la Comunidad Europea.”³⁰ En aquella ocasión Alfonsín declaraba:

Los latinoamericanos hemos ido conformando una realidad propia y diferenciada dentro de la gran familia de Occidente [...] América latina necesita ser reconocida como interlocutor irrenunciable en el nuevo ordenamiento de las relaciones internacionales. No podrá haber un nuevo orden internacional sin nuestra creciente participación.³¹

En sus discursos, ambos presidentes abogaron por la cooperación sur-sur que fortaleciera los proyectos integracionistas.

Maniobras retóricas e imágenes que hablan de nosotros

Al acercarse la fecha de inauguración de la BISP, el Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Argentina decidió seleccionar un nuevo artista como representante oficial por el país, independientemente de la propuesta curatorial de Glusberg. Fue así como el nombre de Alejandro Puentes completó la nómina de la delegación argentina a la BISP.³² La inclusión de su obra contribuyó a ampliar la proyección de la producción artística argentina y su presencia en un lugar privilegiado en la planta baja del pabellón, minó el discurso estético que pretendía cerrarse en un

²⁴ Carta de Horacio Safons y Jorge Glusberg a Sheila Leirner, 26 de julio de 1985.

²⁵ Néstor García Canclini, “Políticas culturales: de las identidades nacionales al espacio latinoamericano”, Néstor García Canclini y Carlos Moneta (coords.), *Las industrias culturales en la integración latinoamericana*, Buenos Aires, Eudeba – SELA, 1999, p. 33 y 43.

²⁶ S/a, “Coinciden Alfonsín y Sarney en impulsar la solidaridad regional”, *La Razón*, Buenos Aires, 30/11/1985, p. 10.

²⁷ S/a, “La trascendencia del encuentro”, *La Razón*, Buenos Aires, 29/11/1985, p. 11.

²⁸ Oscar Raúl Cardoso, “Un momento muy especial”, *Clarín*, Buenos Aires, 29/11/1985, p. 6 y “El comienzo de una nueva etapa”, *Clarín*, 30/11/1985; s/a, “Coincidencias políticas y económicas entre Alfonsín y Sarney en Iguazú”, *Clarín*, Buenos Aires, 30/11/1985, pp. 2 y 3.

²⁹ S/a, “Sorpresivo anuncio”, *La Razón*, Buenos Aires, 29 de noviembre de 1985, p. 11.

³⁰ S/a, “La reunión Alfonsín-Sarney”, *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, 29/11/1985, p. 5.

³¹ Citado en s/a, “Coincidencias frente a males que aquejan a América latina”, *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, 30/11/1985, p. 5.

³² Horacio Hugo Torcello, carta a Sheila Leirner, 29 de mayo de 1985, Archivo de la Fundação Bienal de São Paulo.

eje de lectura afín al de la curaduría general de la bienal y de similar ambigüedad. Si la exposición curada por Glusberg articulaba las obras históricas y contemporáneas de los artistas argentinos en un eje unidireccional “internacionalista”, la presencia de una producción explícitamente vinculada a la reelaboración contemporánea de las formas prehispánicas como la de Puente venía, en cambio, a introducir cierta afirmación identitaria, “regionalista”. De esta manera, su muestra puede pensarse como un contrapunto adecuado para los debates estéticos que se llevaron adelante.

En el catálogo de su muestra Puente escribió:

Una de las características que nuestro país comienza a instaurar en este momento histórico, luego de un proceso oscuro, terrible, que nos ha tocado vivir, es la conciencia de definir una identidad nacional, insertada en esta América latina que tanto nos hace falta conocer. El obstáculo que significa la reiterada importación de situaciones culturales, ajenas a la historia de nuestros pueblos, ha trabado un proceso de conciencia crítica, necesaria para ir elaborando, articulando, aquello que somos o podemos ser.³³

Al cotejar los dos catálogos argentinos, resaltan las disonancias de sus prólogos. Aunque en ambos casos, de alguna manera, se enuncia la necesidad de redefinir la problemática identitaria latinoamericana, sus concepciones son bien diferentes. Uno parece advertir los peligros que supone la importación de modelos que el otro defiende como un fenómeno universal y arribado a nuestras costas como una consecuencia “natural” de los lenguajes del arte. Las divergencias de ambos textos ponen en evidencia la tensión entre las búsquedas de una identidad regional latinoamericana y la incesante adopción de discursos foráneos junto con la inclusión de un vocabulario específico venido de los países centrales “para hablar de nosotros”. El problema no radicaría en la utilización de los mismos términos sino en el hecho de no “disputar nuevos sentidos” con ellos. Cabe señalar entonces que fue menos el pensamiento visual que el discurso crítico el que demostró no poder desligarse de la fascinación por las teorizaciones euronorteamericanas, contribuyendo así a una nueva oleada de argumentaciones sobre la continua dependencia cultural de América latina en el umbral de los tiempos globalizados.

Visiones sobre el arte latinoamericano desde 1985

Si convenimos con Ernesto Laclau en que “lo universal no es otra cosa que un particular que en un cierto momento ha pasado a ser dominante”,³⁴ podemos advertir que la “visión universalista” a la que apelaba la puesta en escena de la 18ª BISP estaba dominada por las particulares construcciones discursivas de un grupo de promotores del arte italiano, alemán y norteamericano que respondían, a su vez, a la dinámica propia de mercado que habían puesto en funcionamiento. En efecto, parte de la crítica latinoamericana parecía “rumiar” una y otra vez esos discursos que se manifestaban, más o menos literalizados, en las retóricas expositivas y textuales del evento. Las posiciones que se filtraban en términos dicotómicos entre universalismo / latinoamericanismo e internacionalismo / regionalismo respondían a discusiones de larga data al interior de la crítica de arte latinoamericano y parecían reponer algunas cuestiones ya resueltas años antes.³⁵ A grandes rasgos, se podría considerar que si en los ‘60 se desarrolló un mentado

³³ Alejandro Puente, *Argentina 1985. Alejandro Puente – XVI Bienal de San Pablo - Brasil*, cat. exp., Buenos Aires, 1985, s/p.

³⁴ Ernesto Laclau, “Universalismo, particularismo y la cuestión de la identidad”, *Emancipación y diferencia*, Buenos Aires, Ariel, 1996, p. 53.

³⁵ Fabiana Serviddio ha analizado el impacto de la crisis del *modelo universalista* como herramienta para establecer el estatuto artístico del arte latinoamericano durante los años setenta en su artículo “La crítica de arte en América Latina: entre el modelo universalista y el latinoamericanista” en AA.VV., *Discutir el canon... op. cit.*, pp. 89-100. Sobre una

proyecto internacionalista³⁶ y en los '70 se produjo un repliegue hacia la "utopía de autonomía del arte latinoamericano"³⁷, en los '80 se verifican, entonces, las oscilaciones entre ambos modelos.

Si bien la curadora Sheila Leirner había procurado deshacerse de los nichos nacionales, su proyecto ecuménico de las artes visuales dentro de la cultura postmoderna sucumbía en su factibilidad. Por un lado, la hegemonía de las "patrias" de los referentes latentes de la transvanguardia *italiana*, el neoexpresionismo *alemán* y la nueva imagen *norteamericana* continuaba operando con innegable poder en el sistema del arte. Por el otro, como señalara Laura Buccellato, los regionalismos brotaban en las superficies que intentaban alisarse.³⁸ En todas y cada una de las reseñas, incluso en la diagramación del catálogo como otro dispositivo de exhibición, las divisiones por países no se diluyeron, sino que siguieron siendo un código ordenador de las lecturas de la bienal. En otras palabras, todavía se estaba lejos de volver verosímil un modo "desterritorializado" del sistema de las artes.³⁹

Pasados casi veinte años Leirner consideró a curaduría de 1985 como anticipatoria de las mediaciones de la crítica de arte y de la circulación globalizada de la imagen en el siglo XXI: "um descobramento completamente prospectivo e quase divinatório da grande teia em que ele acabou por se transformar com a mundialização e o verdadeiro emaranhado do Web."⁴⁰

Lo cierto es que sus esfuerzos por situar a las obras contemporáneas en franco diálogo resultaron, en gran medida, en un soliloquio difícil de interpretar. Para tornar la exposición "verdaderamente internacional" no bastó con estructurarla sin fronteras en la puesta museográfica. Siguiendo el pensamiento de Ticio Esbobar, en lugar de generar estrategias de exhibición dirigidas a "excepcionalizar" las obras para afirmar el propio lugar y exigir la mirada del otro, se las forzó a que formaran parte de la regla, del canon visual establecido por las metrópolis centrales. Así, por los largos corredores de la *Gran Tela*, la mirada oscilaba entre lo relacional y lo individual y era obligada a ser tangencial, abarcativa y por lo tanto generalizada. No obstante, su carácter experimental logró interpelar los límites de negociación de cada uno de los actores en juego (artistas, curadores, críticos, público), como un constructo que aspiraba a tener una dinámica propia y se encontró con varios puntos de tensión en un tiempo de vertiginosos cambios. Cambios cuyos resultados se vislumbrarían tiempo después en el ámbito de la producción teórica de la región y que en torno a la BISP de 1985 se articuló su demanda.

Marcelo Pacheco ha afirmado que en ese preciso año parecía haber llegado el momento para el arte latinoamericano pero que la producción teórica al respecto venía del ámbito europeo y norteamericano. No obstante, diez años después era posible comprobar la existencia en un circuito internacional de muestras y publicaciones latinoamericanas hechas por profesionales latinoamericanos o curadores internacionales pero especializados en América latina. Se "ha comenzado a incorporar sin demasiado toque de lo exótico –por lo menos en apariencia, aunque sí

"nueva etapa de la crítica de arte en América Latina" hacia finales de la década del setenta, véase también el análisis de Néstor García Canclini de la 1ª Bienal Latinoamericana de Arte de San Pablo de 1978, Néstor García Canclini, "¿Uso artístico de los mitos o uso mítico del arte? A propósito de la Bienal de San Pablo", en *Punto de Vista*, año II, nº 6, julio 1979, pp. 35-38.

³⁶ Cf. Andrea Giunta, *Vanguardia, internacionalismo y política*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, 2001.

³⁷ Fabiana Serviddio, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

³⁸ Laura Buccellato, "La reciente Bienal de San Pablo", *Artinf*, año 11, nº 56/57, Buenos Aires, otoño 1986, p. 12.

³⁹ Un modo "desterritorializado" creciente como el que García Canclini identificaba varios años más tarde en la creación, difusión y recepción del arte. Véase Néstor García Canclini, "Rehacer los pasaportes. El pensamiento visual en el debate sobre multiculturalidad", en Gustavo Curiel, Renato González Mello y Juana Gutiérrez Haces (eds.), *Arte, Historia e Identidad en América Visiones comparativas*, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1994, pp. 1001-1009.

⁴⁰ Sheila Leirner, "Uma geração que pertence ao presente", en Marcus de Londra Costa, *Onde está você, Geração 80?*, cat. exp., Río de Janeiro, Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, 2004, pp. 74 y 75.

marcando siempre la idea de lo diferente—, a ciertos artistas, ciertas obras, ciertas discusiones del arte latinoamericano”.⁴¹

En definitiva, durante aquellos años comenzaron a generarse las condiciones de posibilidad para que la producción crítica *desde y sobre* América latina desarrollara sus argumentos, ya no en términos reduccionistas y dicotómicos, sino apuntando a los desplazamientos y transgresiones de los modelos centrales⁴² y a los principios de interacción en clave transnacional. Elocuente ejemplo de lo cual es el presente foro.

⁴¹ Marcelo Pacheco, “Nuevos modelos de exposiciones de arte latinoamericano del siglo XXI: impacto y eficacia”, en AA.VV., *Circuitos latinoamericanos. Circuitos internacionales: interacción, roles y perspectivas*, Buenos Aires, arteBA Fundación, 2005, pp. 24 y 25.

⁴² Ticio Escobar, “Modernidades paralelas” en *op. cit.*, p. 21.

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From artistic internationalism to cultural globalisation: notes towards a critical reflection on the recent changes in the strategies of (re)presentation of the São Paulo Bienal¹

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Introduction: institutional critique or crisis?

The 28th SPB's curatorial project presented itself as a critique of the Bienal. At his first press conference after the appointment, Ivo Mesquita declared that the São Paulo Bienal had fulfilled its original mission of consolidation a local artistic system and international projection of Brazilian art.² Thus, curators Ivo Mesquita and Ana Paula Cohen's conception was that it would be the moment to convert the exhibition into a platform for reflection and debate on the biennial system across in the international art circuit,³ taking the history of the São Paulo Bienal itself as a reference, through a political strategy of reactivation of its memory and archive.⁴ Its concrete result was the creation of a 'Reading Floor', a 'flexible archive'⁵ set in the third floor of the Bienal pavillion,⁶ including an

¹ This text presents some reflections arising from my PhD thesis, developed at the University of São Paulo's School of Communication and Arts and financed by the São Paulo State Foundation for the Support of Research (FAPESP). The São Paulo Bienal became the focus of my research around the time of my collaborations with the coverage of the 27th edition's seminars, on which I co-authored (with Liliane Benetti, from the Centre for Research on Modern and Contemporary Brazilian Art, University of São Paulo's School of Communication and Arts) for the website of the Art Museum Permanent Forum project (www.forumpermanente.org). I thank Liliane for helping me revise the seminars and elaborate some ideas on the articulation between the aesthetic and political that remain with me to this day.

² Text accessed on the Bienal de São Paulo website, January 2007. <http://bienalsaopaulo.globo.com/>

³ Ivo Mesquita e Ana Paula Cohen, *Em vivo contato*, 28ª Bienal de São Paulo, Guia da exposição, 2008.

⁴ The Wanda Svevo Historical Archive, originally the Contemporary Art Historical Archive, was created by Wanda Svevo, secretary of the Modern Art Museum of São Paulo Bienal, in 1954. It presently occupies a 400 m² area on the second floor of the São Paulo Bienal Foundation.

⁵ System conceived by Ana Paula Cohen on the Istmo project. <http://www.forumpermanente.org/.rede/proj-istmo/>

⁶ The Ciccillo Matarazzo Pavilion, former Palace of the Industries, was designed by Oscar Niemeyer and hosts the São Paulo Bienal since its first edition in 1957. It is part of a set of buildings in Ibirapuera Park that was opened in 1953 for the city of São Paulo 400th anniversary.

exhibition space, a library with catalogues of different Bienals and periodical exhibitions from around the world, and a conference hall. The second floor of the Ciccillo Matarazzo building was left empty, while the first would, in principle, be made into a public square (as in Niemeyer's original design), establishing 'a new relationship between the Bienal and its surroundings – park, city – which opens up like the Greek agora, a space for encounters, confrontations, frictions'.⁷ It was a sort of conversion of Oscar Niemeyer's project into an architectural metaphor for the curatorial proposal, rendering the public dimension of the building explicit, while harbouring inside it a process of critical reflection on the institution.

It may have been appropriate, after all, for part of the press to label the 28th edition 'the void Bienal', despite the curators' protests and the last-minute choice of architecture as the symbol of modernity's utopias and impasses. The proposal to transform the Pavillion's ground floor into a public square was changed not only because of the (budget-motivated) abandonment of the idea of removing the casements in the pavilion's downstairs windows, but also because of the heavy security apparatus set up after the opening, when a group of tagged the empty space in the second floor. After the incident, the curators declared the manifestation as a criminal act of vandalism against the cities cultural heritage, and the system of checks installed was similar to those found in international airports since 9/11. Such was the central point in Fábio Cypriano's critique,⁸ questioning the legitimacy of the choice of Ivo Mesquita's curatorial project, undeclared interests in the use of public funds, the reasons for the demotion of curator Thomas Mulclaire, the lack of public at the debates etc. The episode was also referred to by architect Ligia Nobre, co-founder of the social organisation EXO experimental org (www.exo.org.br), a platform for field research in art and urbanism in São Paulo active between 2002 and 2007. Emphasising the contradictions between the discourse and the practice of the curators, she asks: 'the Bienal called the taggers criminals, and Cohen disqualified them as "those people from the periphery" during the press conference. This is not quite the kind of "living contact" promised by her and Mesquita. If the 28th Bienal claimed to be a public space of social inclusion, should it not be open precisely to "those people from the periphery"?'⁹

Ironically, the incident at the exhibition's opening is symptomatic of a crisis in the public sphere that had already been addressed by the previous edition. In a debate back then, Renato Janine Ribeiro commented on the present condition of the Sé Square in the centre of São Paulo. An important meeting point for public manifestations in the 1980s, such as those of the movement for direct presidential election after 20 years of military dictatorship, it has lost all its social dynamic since being remodelled by the local administration, becoming a space where the most visible form of 'participation' is that of taggers and graffiti artists.¹⁰ Another example of the impasses of the modernising process

⁷ Ivo Mesquita e Ana Paula Cohen, *Em vivo contato*, 28ª Bienal de São Paulo, Guia da exposição, 2008.

⁸ CYPRIANO, Fábio. Um acordo de cavalheiros em vivo contato, *Fórum Permanente de Museus de Arte* (www.forumpermanente.org)

⁹ NOBRE, Ligia. Taggers get into 'living contact' with vacant São Paulo Bienal. *Art Review*, 4 de novembro de 2008.

¹⁰ *Seminário Reconstrução*, 27ª Bienal de São Paulo, 09 e 10 de junho de 2006.

in São Paulo is Luis Carlos Berrini avenue. Seen from the perspective of the *favela* on the opposite side of the Pinheiros river, it reflects the country's extreme social and educational inequality, as well as the urban paradigm of protection and control discussed by Spanish artist Antoni Muntadas in relation to the end of the public sphere and the sensation of fear that leads to installation of fences, gates and vigilance systems.¹¹ We are witnessing what Brian Holmes has called 'the urbanisation of blindness', in reference to the way in which the Paris 2005 protests did not manage to disrupt the flow of tourists or the city's cultural life.¹² During the preparation of the 27th SPB in 2006, a crime syndicate known as PCC (First Commando of the Capital), whose leaders controlled drug traffic by mobile phone from inside the jail, attacked police stations and public transport, and brought a metropolis of 18 million inhabitants to an almost complete standstill.

The end of the São Paulo Bienal?

The taggers' radical response, and the heavy-handed repression dealt by the Bienal Foundation, evidenced the displacement of the conceptual axis of the Bienal's last two editions. The speculations on the concept of art in terms of formal experimentation and evolution, or even the overcoming of the Western canon, characteristic of the 1990s., have given way to a discussion on the politics of art and other aspects of 'life in common' and the crisis of representation.

I take the relation between the end of the political and cultural modernising project, at the end of the 1960s, and the 'void' used as aesthetic or institutional-critical strategy, in order to question the premise the 28SPB's curators began from in 2007. The curator's argument was that the Bienal had already achieved its initial goals (or its historical mission) to the extent that it had made São Paulo into one of the great centres of world art. I believe such a perspective belies a certain teleological appeal to the notion of progress implicit in 'grand narratives', criticised by post-modern and post-colonial theories in their analysis of the historical construction of European modernism and the tensions inherent in core-periphery relations. Besides, Mesquita and Ana Paula Cohen's idea dates back to the developmentalist discourse of the 1950s, the belief in the emancipatory promises of modernity, with no reference to the various fates of the modern project or the partial accomplishment of its aims.

The (counter) argument here is that the initial project of modernisation and internationalisation of Brazilian art proposed by the São Paulo arrived at its end a long time ago, since the boycott led by Mário Pedrosa against the tenth Bienal, in 1969, as a

¹¹ 'The Social in Arte; between ethics and aesthetics', a round-table with Claire Bishop, Antoni Muntadas, Sônia Salzstein and Paula Trope, November 9th 2006, School of Communication and Arts, University of São Paulo.

¹² HOLMES, Brian. Beyond the global 1000. *CIMAM 2005 Annual Conference*, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, novembro 2005.

strategy against the military dictatorship – starting a phase which went down in Brazilian cultural history as a 'cultural void'.¹³ Adopting a different historical reading, this article critically reflects on the role of the São Paulo Bienal today. The goal is to examine the artistic and cultural debate that took place around the SPB in the last 57 years and to identify the central questions for a critical reflection on its history and political and cultural project. Firstly, we will look at the project of the São Paulo Bienal, initiated in 1951, from the point of view of the role the exhibition has had in the reformulation of notions of identity in Brazilian art, in their connection to the developmentalism and cultural transnationalisation that marked those years.

In many ways, the Bienal's history belongs to the period of consolidation of the developmentalist project and of the flourishing of nationalistic, identitarian discourses in the first half of the 20th century. The specific project of the SPB resulted from the progressive ideas of Brazilian entrepreneur Francisco "Ciccillo" Matarazzo Sobrinho, founder of the São Paulo Modern Art Museum,¹⁴ and of the city's situation in the post-war period as the centre of the country's modernising and industrialising aspirations. Today, it is one of the largest metropolitan region in the world, and personifies the contradictions of a country 'condemned to be modern', to borrow Mário Pedrosa's words.

For a country that, in less than a century, had become independent from Portugal (1822), abolished slavery (1888) and established a republican regime (1889), modernity,¹⁵ as a *project* with its sights set on a certain degree of historical development, represented the opportunity for a break with the colonial past and the submission to European domination.

Colombian thinker Jesús-Martín Barbero, a key figure in Cultural Studies in Latin America, understands modernisation as a political action promoted by the Brazilian state with the support of self-appointed progressive elites for the promotion of societal transformation. This action, carried out by a centralising state, is centred on industrialisation and the reorganisation of the economy. According to him:

From the 1920s on, the majority of Latin American countries begins a reorganisation of their economies and readjustment of their political structures. Industrialisation is undertaken with import substitution at its centre, in the promotion of an internal market and the employment of a growing labour force, making state intervention, through investment in transport and communication infrastructure, decisive. Therefore, even when the start of the industrialising process responds to the international market's

¹³ The term (coined by the journalist Zuenir Ventura) expressed the disappointment arising from the rupture between the modernising process and the ideals of emancipation – an association, which led to the political support of many leftwing intellectuals to the modernising impulse, according to whose logic political democracy would be a natural consequence of economic growth.

¹⁴ The first biennials were promoted by the São Paulo Modern Art Museum, founded by Ciccillo Matarazzo in 1948. In 1962, with the creation of the São Paulo Bienal Foundation, the MAM ceased to exist and its collection was donated to the University of São Paulo. Intellectuals and artists who opposed the MAM's extinction re-founded it in the following years. It occupies a space in Ibirapuera Park today.

¹⁵ In the sense I use it here, modernity signifies a stage in the development of European and North American societies which served as the ideal model for modernising agents in Latin America.

*functioning conditions, there are differences in the scope and rhythm which correspond to the degree of development of the 'national project' – differences that forge each country's bourgeoisie from the second half of the 20th century.*¹⁶

The main goal of Latin American modernisation was to break with the colonial relation in which the periphery produces primary commodities and consumes manufactured products. At the cultural level, this situation of colonial dependency expresses itself when 'the colony is ethnographic material that lives off foreign-produced cultural imports'.¹⁷

Barbero stresses this ambivalence in Latin American modernisation and modernism: the process of creating a distinctive cultural identity and becoming a nation, in the modern sense, led traditional societies to emulate Western Europe's steps towards modernity, adopting the hegemonic countries' as a reference with which to validate their achievements.¹⁸ Brazilian modernisation, however, would be out of step with its European model, with the result that being 'out of step' would define our cultural difference.

If it is true that different national formations follow different paths and rhythms, it can also be said that the ensemble of this diversity will undergo a fundamental rearrangement. The possibility of 'forming' nations, in the modern sense of the word, will have to involve the establishment of national markets; these, in turn, will be possible to the extent that they adjust to the needs and demands of the international market. This dependent mode of access to modernity, however, will render visible not only the 'unequal development, the inequality that is pre-condition for capitalist development, but also the 'simultaneous discontinuity' on whose back Latin America lives out its modernisation. (...) The non-contemporaneity of which we speak must be clearly distinguished from the idea of a constitutive backwardness, i.e., backwardness made into the explanatory key for cultural difference. This is an idea manifested in two versions. One, thinking that the originality of Latin America as a whole and Latin American countries was constituted by factors that escape the logic of capitalist development. The other, thinking modernisation as a recovery of wasted time, therefore identifying development with a definitive ceasing to be what one used to be in order to finally become modern. The discontinuity that we try to think here is situated in another key, that allows us to break both with an a-historical, culturalist model and a cumulative-rationality paradigm, with its pretension of unifying and subsuming under a single time all the different socio-historical temporalities. So as to think both what backwardness meant in historical terms, not as in a time that would have been stopped, but in relation to a historically produced backwardness; and what, in spite of backwardness, exists in

¹⁶ JESÚS, Martín-Barbero. *Dos meios às mediações: comunicação, cultura e hegemonia*. 2. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Editora UFRJ, 2001, p.227.

¹⁷ Roland Corbisier cited in ORTIZ, Renato. *Mundialização e cultura*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 2000, p.93.

¹⁸ JESÚS, Martín-Barbero. *Dos meios às mediações: comunicação, cultura e hegemonia*. 2. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Editora UFRJ, 2001, p.226-230.

*terms of difference, cultural heterogeneity, the multiplicity of temporalities of indigenous, black and white, and the time produced by their mixture.*¹⁹

This passage is worth quoting at length as it provides evidence of the sophistication of the idea of temporal discontinuity as a tool with which to comment on modern development in the periphery of capitalism, avoiding simplism and trying to think a modernity that cannot be reduced to imitation or a difference that cannot be exhausted in backwardness.

Avoiding the mistake of positing an 'ideal' modernism in core countries and of adopting an evolutionist view of history where the fate of Brazilian civilisation would be to arrive at some pre-determined state, Barbero emphasises the contradictions that allow us to think the appearance of Brazilian modernism. After all, as an attempt to overcome the colonial traditional of cultural dependence, Brazilian modern art sought its own local specificity, adopting the supposedly 'universal' model of the internationalist current that became hegemonic in the post-war period, which had abstractionism and painting as its main vehicles.

European modernism would appear then as a model to be imported and adapt to the local context. It is a spatial displacement, an 'idea out of place', to borrow one of the most important hypotheses for the interpretation of the relationship between our economic dependency as peripheric country, resulting from colonialism, and the recourse to models imported from core countries also in the symbolic field, as developed by literary critic Roberto Schwarz.²⁰

Anthropologist Renato Ortiz²¹ points out the ties, in Brazil, between modernism and the construction of a national project. The self-awareness of cultural dependency led to an effort to overcome the established hierarchy of core and periphery and the dynamic of emulation of foreign models – as task carried out through the creation of a Brazilian modern art and of a distinctive, unified cultural identity for the entire nation. Therefore, 'modernism, modernity e modernisation are interchangeable term for us'; modernism in Brazil would then be 'an idea out of place' that is progressively adjusted to a developing society.²²

Inaugurated by the São Paulo Modern Art Week of 1922, Brazilian modernism was the starting point for a project of national culture and search for the 'Brazilianness' of our art. While modernism contested local specificities and proclaimed a universal myth, the

¹⁹ JESÚS, Martín-Barbero. *Dos meios às mediações: comunicação, cultura e hegemonia*. 2. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Editora UFRJ, 2001, p.225-226.

²⁰ SCHWARZ, Roberto. As idéias fora do lugar. In: *Cultural e Política*. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2001.

²¹ ORTIZ, Renato. *A moderna tradição brasileira: cultura brasileira e indústria cultural*. 5a ed. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1994.

²² ORTIZ, Renato. *A moderna tradição brasileira: cultura brasileira e indústria cultural*. 5a ed. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1994, p.209.

Brazilian modernist movement posed the question of Brazilian art. 'Paradoxically, internationalist modern art sets Brazilian culture in the path of self-examination'.²³

There is, however, a fundamental difference between this first modernist moment and the internationalisation of Brazilian art that occurs after the war. The idea of culturally-dependent situation inherited from the colonial period and imported artistic canons gives way to a questioning of cultural imperialism and US hegemony during the Cold War.²⁴ In line with public policies for the affirmation of modern art and North American post-war cultural diplomacy, the political and cultural project of the São Paulo Bienal was as a decisive step for the modernisation of the Brazilian art system and the country's insertion in the international scene, for better or worse.²⁵ In the words of Lourival Gomes Machado, first artistic director of the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art Bienal, 'by its own definition, the Bienal should accomplish two main tasks: to place Brazilian modern art not merely in confrontation, but in living contact with world art; at the same time as it sought to establish São Paulo as an art centre on a global scale'.²⁶ It is no surprise that these words were made into last year's edition's slogan. In this regard, the SPB saw, on the cultural plane, an attempt to breaking with a situation of dependency, defining the specificities of local production and promoting its inclusion in the international circuit.

The Bienal's first impact in the local artistic sphere, as is well know, was to promote the rise of the movements of constructive art in Brazil. It is, in fact, an artist coming from this trajectory – Hélio Oiticica – who goes on to theorise the Brazilian avant-garde and the conditions of aesthetic experimentalism in peripheric contexts,²⁷ shaping what remains today a frame of reference for the analysis of the process of internationalisation of Brazilian art and the different consequences of the appearance of popular mass culture in the country.

Now, in order to understand the 'living contact' produced by the SPB until the early 1970s, we cannot forget art critic Sônia Salzstein's remark that, despite the pressures of internationalisation, Brazil developed a singular experience that resisted any homogenising tendency. She writes: 'It was an experience that could not be simply explained as a foreseeable effect of the expansion of Euro-American modernity nor as an epigone version of it, showing no more than regional interest or relevance'.²⁸ Examples of such relevance, to mention but a few, include the formal experimentations of

²³ ZILIO, Carlos. Da Antropofagia à Tropicália. In: NOVAES, Adauto. *O nacional e o popular na cultural brasileira: artes plásticas e literatura*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1983, p. 14.

²⁴ BELTING, Hans. *O fim da história da arte: uma revisão dez anos depois*. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2006, p.51-58.

²⁵ PEDROSA, Mário. A bienal de cá pra lá. In: AMARAL, Aracy (org.). *Mundo, Homem, Arte em Crise*. 2 ed. São Paulo: Perspectiva: 1986 (1975), p. 254-56.

²⁶ MACHADO, Lourival Gomes. "Apresentação". IN: Catálogo da I Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 1951, p. 14.

²⁷ OITICICA, Hélio. Esquema Geral da Nova Objetividade Brasileira. In: *Hélio Oiticica*. Rio de Janeiro: Centro de Artes Hélio Oiticica, 1992. (Catálogo de exposição)

²⁸ 'It was an experience that could not be simply explained as a foreseeable effect of the expansion of Euro-American modernity nor as an epigone version of it, showing no more than regional interest or relevance'. SALZSTEIN, Sônia. Pop as a crisis in the public sphere. In: MERCER, Kobena. *Annotating Art's Histories*. Londres: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2005, p.102.

neoconcretism, the theoretical and poetic formulations of Ferreira Gullar and Hélio Oiticica, and the 'tropicalist' cultural effervescence that preceded the diaspora of Brazilian artists in the 'years of lead' of the dictatorship.²⁹

From the 1980s on, during the process of democratic reorganisation of Brazilian society, the projects designed by Vilém Flusser and Walter Zanini³⁰ around the appearance of new languages and developments of conceptual art, as well as the reconstitution of the local art circuit, surrounded with doubts the policies of (re)presentation and the modernist discourses in which the identity of Brazilian art was defined.³¹ Besides, as a consequence of the processes of cultural globalisation, the expansion of Western modernism beyond the established standards of artistic internationalism sparked a 'crisis of representation' in the SPB in which the conventional oppositions (local/global, core/periphery, modern/traditional etc.) seemed to become obsolete.³²

In the guise of conclusion

Here, therefore, without ignoring the transformation that took place and the institutional and geopolitical contexts since the 1970s, we will discuss the insertion of the São Paulo Bienal in the dynamic of global art. In this new global order of the art system, a certain number of responses to present problems, or the 'post-modern condition', were articulated by curators Nelson Aguilar (1994-1996), Paulo Herkenhoff (1998), Lisette Lagnado (2006) and Ivo Mesquita (2008).

The recent changes in the SPB may show that the institution is moving away from a perspective oriented by the discourses of contemporary art's hegemonic centres. Turning inwards to its own history, it has examined its modernist foundations, seeking to question its relation to Euro-America in the terms put forward by Oswald de Andrade in 1928's 'Anthropophagic Manifesto'.³³ At least this was the device employed by curator Paulo

²⁹ Despite many artists staying in the country, the 1970s have become marked by the idea of 'cultural void' advanced by journalist Zuenir Ventura to oppose the period to the hegemony of a leftwing culture in the previous decade. VENTURA, Zuenir. *A crise da cultura brasileira*, *Visão*, 1971.

³⁰ Zanini was the first to occupy the post of São Paulo Bienal curator; until the 1970s, the function was performed by a general director.

³¹ Cf. Aracy Amaral's texts on the internationalisation of the Brazilian art system and on the history of modern art in Latin America. AMARAL, Aracy. *Textos do Trópico de Capricórnio: artigos e ensaios (1980-2005)* – Vol. 2: Circuitos de arte na América Latina e no Brasil. São Paulo: Ed. 34, 2006.

³² CANCLINI, Nestor. *Culturas híbridas: estratégias para entrar e sair da modernidade*. 2. ed. São Paulo: Edusp, 2003.

³³ The Manifesto was inspired by a Tupi ritual consisting in devouring the bravest captives from the enemy army in order to absorb their vital force. Displaced onto the field of culture, the concept of anthropophagy has become a metaphor of Brazilian culture's relationship with its European 'matrix'. In its association with the exotic or primitive character of cannibalism, it signals a specific position of the development of an artistic avant-garde in the context of the rediscovery of the Brazilian modern tradition by 1960s Tropicalism. According to Hélio Oiticica, the experimentalism that characterises our modernism can be

Herkenhoff in 1988 in order to maximise the Bienal's affirmation of Brazilian art, begun in 1989 with Stella Teixeira de Barros as the curator of the Brazilian representation. In his words, 'Antropophagy is one of the first concepts of Brazilian cultural to enter the international grammar of art'³⁴, offering an alternative and counterpoint to the so-called 'Western' interpretation of the history of art, which neglects the multiplicity of existing modernism and sets of parameters of exclusion.³⁵ A few years before, in the 22nd Bienal, curator Nelson Aguilar had already organised special rooms for artists Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Clark and Mira Schendel to affirm the quality of local artists at the same level as other national representations of great renown.³⁶ This strategy would be discontinued given the institutional crisis confronted by the Bienal around the turn of the century, and would only be taken up again in 2005, when Hélio Oiticica was chosen as the conceptual paradigm for the 27th SPB, and his texts became the theoretical frame of reference for the elaboration of the curatorial project presented by Lisette Lagnado. In a text on Oiticica from 1966, Lagnado mentions that critic Mário Pedrosa first used the term post-modernism when proposing the passage of art to a 'state of culture'.³⁷ This reversal of perspective, in which a Brazilian artist appears as the precursor of such a significant shift, allows for new interpretations of the international development of contemporary art.³⁸ It also allows one to speak about contemporary art exhibitions from the point of view of a Brazilian experience, revealing a local contribution of the São Paulo Bienal to the global phenomenon of the spread of biennials across the world.

Inspired by Roland Barthes' 1976-1977 Collège de France lectures, the 27th SPB started many months before the opening of the exhibition, with a programme of international seminars inspired by the platforms of Documenta 11 and the Documenta 10 *100 Days - 100 Guests* programme, in which the team of curators directed by Lagnado (Cristina Freire, Jochen Volz, José Roca, Rosa Martínez and Adriano Pedrosa) offered to the public access to the ideas that oriented the whole exhibition.³⁹ The intention was to

understood as a process of creation of a new, Brazilian artistic language through the incorporation of other, international languages – for instance, Pop Art and the 'Nouveaux Réalistes' of French critic Pierre Restany.

³⁴ HERKENHOFF, Paulo. Bienal 1998, princípios e processos. *Trópico*, April, 2008.

³⁵ HERKENHOFF, Paulo. Apresentação. 24ª Bienal de São Paulo. Núcleo histórico: antropofagia e histórias de canibalismos. Catálogo da Exposição. São Paulo: Fundação Bienal, p. 22.

³⁶ Nelson Aguilar adopted the concept of 'rupture with the medium' to question the traditional categories of 'beaux arts' and the notion of artwork itself, confronting the Western modernist canon and the universalist conception of art. Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Clark and Mira Schendel were thus chosen by the curator as 'beacons' of national production for the 22nd SPB. Lygia Clark and Mira Schendel represented Brasil at the 1968 Venice Biennale, but did not achieve the recognition of international art circuit. After a retrospective in Rotterdam, Paris, Barcelona, Lisbon and Minneapolis, ten years after his death in 1980, Hélio Oiticica achieved a certain visibility outside the country, with works at Documenta 10 (1997), alongside Lygia Clark, and at the Tate Modern (2007). There are doubts, however, as to the effects of the insertion of a few names in Brazilian art in the international circuit in what regards the recognition and systematic presence of Brazilian art outside the country, as well as to the benefits of building up a profile abroad to the consolidation of the local art system. Cf. FIALHO, Ana Letícia. Mercado de Artes: Global e Desigual, *Trópico*, 2005.

³⁷ PEDROSA, Mário. Arte ambiental, arte pós-moderna, Hélio Oiticica. *Correio da Manhã*, 26 de junho de 1966.

³⁸ LAGANDO, Lisette. O além da arte de Hélio Oiticica. *Trópico*.

³⁹ PEDROSA, Adriano. *Como curar junto*. In: LAGNADO, Lisette, PEDROSA, Adriano (orgs.). 27ª Bienal de São Paulo: Como viver junto. São Paulo: Fundação Bienal, 2006, p. 84.

replace the Venetian model of national pavilions with a platform of debates on 'the political' (that is, life in common) in which the blurring of boundaries between the public spheres of art and politics would set in motion a programme of self-critique and deconstruction of these institutions' limits. The 27th Bienal's response to the so-called 'crisis of representation' was thus to abolish national representations altogether, 'a system that undermined the possibility of establishing a project independently from the authority of constituted powers' and, with it, 'giving a political dimension to an exhibition of such importance for the city, Brazil, and the world'.⁴⁰

Looking back upon the 27th SPB's curatorial project today, with a distance of three years, it seems to me that there were two distinct visions at play: one that went reached back towards *institutional critique* and the work of conceptual artists such as Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, Dan Graham, Marcel Broodthaers (featured artist at the first of the international seminars); and one that turned towards contemporary production, where emphasis was placed on a *political art*, sociological in nature and visibly seeking an encounter with so-called marginalised communities. In a certain way, the background for this discussion was the idea of a 'reconstruction' of a public sphere that traversed a reflection on architecture and urbanism (another theme of the seminars) and political projects that incorporated the recognition of the *other*. In the realm of visual arts, this recognition was linked, for example, to the inclusion of 'modernisms' produced outside the legitimating centre of Western modern art.

⁴⁰ LAGNADO, Lisette. *No amor e na adversidade*. In: LAGNADO, Lisette, PEDROSA, Adriano (orgs.). *27ª Bienal de São Paulo: Como viver junto*. São Paulo: Fundação Bienal, 2006, p. 53.

La Ruta de la Amistad: International Monumental Sculpture Collaborative Project for the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City.

Abstract-

For the 1968 Summer Olympic Games at Mexico City a cultural Olympiad was created. The most important event of this Cultural Olympiad was the International Symposium of Sculptors. The goal of this symposium was the creation of nineteen sculptures along the newly constructed freeway, between the city center and the southern outskirts where the Olympic Village was located for the XIX Olympiad at Mexico City. This part of the *Periferico* is called the *Route of Friendship*. Mathias Goeritz creator of the project and main promoter envisioned this venture as collaboration with nineteenth different artists from different parts of the world. This paper would outline the original conceptions and how they gradually were changed by various circumstances. We will also discuss the positive aspects of the finally achieved *Route* and, the errors that Goeritz believed were made at various stages of the venture. More importantly the paper will explore the institutional shift in aesthetic terms that the *Route* achieved.

The Route of Friendship (Ruta de la Amistad) was the centerpiece of the Cultural Olympics planned to accompany the traditional sporting event, a massive collaborative endeavor. Mathias Goeritz, artistic advisor for the Mexican Olympiad, proposed the construction of a sequence of sculptures, each designed by a different artist selected to represent, in total, all the major areas of the globe. The sculptures would run beside the new freeway between the city center and the southern outskirts where the Olympic Village was located. By definition the sculptures had to be monumental, and large enough to be experienced from passing automobiles. The other requirement was that they

were to be abstract in design and with concrete as the main material. One of the questions that this essay would try to answer is the shift in institutionalized aesthetics that occurred at this moment in Mexican history; that is the fact that the major aesthetic project of the Mexican Olympic Games presented to the world was restricted to sculpted abstract forms as opposed to figurative painting.

From this utopian dream of collaboration, Goertiz would not come out in good terms and he had to accept much criticism. At the end of the project only one artist from Africa (Morocco) was included out of the expected three; one from Japan that represented the whole Asian continent and the heaviest weight of artist went to Europe with 10 represented artists. But he was able to achieve the inclusion of the work of two Mexican women artists, among other accomplishments. *The Route of Friendship* is one of the first major cultural and artistic contemporary encounters between Latin America, Europe and the USA. The theme of this paper represents a focused case study on the work developed by these artists for this project, as well as the artistic networks across post-war Latin America, Europe and the USA where the figure of Goeritz is the link between all these different collaborators. The *Route* is considered the longest sculptural corridor in the world and they have been gradually restored after many years of neglect.

La Ruta de la Amistad: International Monumental Sculpture Collaborative Project for the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City

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Mexico City won the contest to host the XIX Olympic Games that took place in October of 1968. The Olympic Games in Mexico City were hosted, for the first time, in a developing country and in a Spanish speaking country. More importantly, and for the purpose of this paper, they were also the first modern games to hold a Cultural Olympiad at the same time. During the Ancient Olympic Games there was an important cultural element present; the Greeks believed in the idea of celebrating mind and body. That tradition was interrupted when the Olympic Committee started the Modern Olympic Games in 1894. Mexico brought back that tradition with the 1968 Olympiad. The twenty sports events on the agenda for the Olympiad were matched by twenty cultural events.

In 1966 the German-Mexican sculptor and artist Mathias Goeritz proposed to the head of the Mexican Olympic Games the creation of a series of cultural events. As one of the events of the Cultural Olympic Games, Goeritz proposed a sort of Olympiad of Sculptors. This idea took into account the fact that in ancient times the Olympics were not limited to physical contests but also included a cultural program in which sculpture played an important part. This paper will also discuss the positive aspects of the finally achieved *Ruta de la Amistad (Route of Friendship)* and the errors that Goeritz believed were made at various stages of the venture. More importantly the paper will explore the institutional shift in aesthetic terms that the *Route* achieved.

As part of the program of the cultural Olympiad there were six events dedicated to the visual arts and the most ambitious plan of the cultural Olympiad was the creation of a

Symposium of Contemporary Sculptors in Mexico.¹ The International Sculptors Meeting took place in June of 1967. Numerous meetings devoted exclusively to aesthetic questions had already been held in the past in different parts of the world, but the idea was that this one should give the artists a specific task or theme. The specific task included three aspects that served as requirements for each sculpture:

- 1) Abstract in design
- 2) Monumental in scale
- 3) The use of concrete as the main material

At the inaugural of the International Meeting of Sculptors in 1968, Goeritz articulated his vision with the following statement:

Modern man's environment is becoming increasingly chaotic. The growth of population, the socialization of life and the advance of technology have created an atmosphere of confusion. The ugliness of many indispensable elements and of advertising, in general, disfigures urban communities, particularly in the suburbs and on the highways; the latter, in this century of accelerated tempo and the automobile, have acquired an unprecedented significance. As a consequence, there is an urgent need for artistic design focused on contemporary town and thoroughfare planning. The artist, instead of being invited to collaborate with urban planners, architects and engineers, stands apart and produces only for the minority that visits art galleries and museums. An art integrated from the very inception of the urban plan is of fundamental importance in our age. This means that artistic work will leave its surroundings of art for art's sake and establish contact with the masses by means of total planning.²

Goeritz had full responsibility for the direction of the overall project, including the selection of a site for each sculpture. However, he had to justify his ideas and their realization to the Chairman of the Organizing Committee of the Olympiad. He was after all the only person who had an articulated vision of the project. Goeritz was not afraid of breaking the boundaries between sculpture and architecture because they were conceived

from the point of view of a driving viewer. He also understood sculpture as an intervention among the constructed environment.

The goal of this paper is to present a discussion of the idea, planning and execution of nineteen monumental sculptures along the newly constructed freeway, which in Mexico City is called the *Periferico*. The *Periferico* runs between the city center and the southern outskirts where the Olympic Village was located for the XIX Olympiad. The selection of the artists was supposed to gather sculptors from every continent and from all ethnic groups. It thus had an idealistic and humanistic nature that transcended aesthetics and was in conformity with the fundamental principles of the Olympic Movement. It was to be an international event with the unifying theme of brotherhood of all the peoples of the world. The particular problem the sculptors were to solve limited their artistic liberty with the following restrictions: the sculptures had to be made of concrete, be monumental, and abstract. Furthermore, the sculptors were supposed to have in mind solutions related to being located adjacent to a superhighway.

This part of the *Periferico* became known as the *Route of Friendship*. Goeritz, creator of the project and its main promoter, envisioned this venture as a collaboration with nineteen different artists from different parts of the world. The sculptural works were designed for permanent location along the twelve miles of the Olympic Freeway, an extension of the new periphery that encircled Mexico City. Of course, the idea of relating sculpture to a road or an avenue is an old one, with the difference being that in the 1930s, the car had supplanted the horse. Goeritz's decision to locate the sculptures along a freeway was perhaps due to his previous experience while building the iconic *Satellite Towers*. *The Towers*, executed in 1957, is a group of monumental sculpture consisting of

five concrete towers of unequal height in the center of a traffic circle. This project allowed him to discover another viewer, which is the driving viewer. Furthermore in 1966, in a book titled *The View from the Road*, the author Donald Appleyard published his results of several photographic experiments done while driving a car and photographing different sights. The results interested Goeritz tremendously and used them to develop his own visual theory and with that the creation of a new art language.³

Once finished, the *Route of Friendship* constituted the longest corridor of sculpture in the world. Seventeen kilometers in length, these sculptures were of different heights: from almost eight meters to twenty-two meters. They are placed with a distance from each other of about a kilometer and a half each. To put this project into perspective, we should remember that the last major public international sculpture competition happened in England in 1952-3 with the controversial *Monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner* project. According to Andrew Causey, “until 1959 figuration of one sort or another was the dominant mode, at least in sculpture and among younger artists with post-war reputations.”⁴ So, try to imagine the visual effect that these sculptures had on the general Mexican population; a country whose most predominant aesthetic was painterly and figurative with the works of the Muralists like Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros and Jose Clemente Orozco. The *Route* was even more remarkable at night. Each sculpture was illuminated from the ground up. Unfortunately, as the lamps were installed on the ground, most of them were damaged or vandalized.

The scope of this paper does not allow for a presentation of a time line of the condition of the sculptures throughout these years, but it is worth noting briefly that they have gone from the total splendor of their presence in 1968 through roughly the late

1970s to a state of abandonment and then restoration on and off for the last twenty years. What I think is important to mention is that the nineteen sculptures are still located in the same place and that one of Goeritz's goals of making a permanent installation still is in effect after more than forty years.

Invited Sculptors and their Sculptures
(In order of appearance along the route):

Artist	Country	Title
Angela Gurría (b. 1929)	México	<i>Señales</i>
Willi Gutmann (b. 1927)	Switzerland	<i>El Ancla</i>
Milos Chlupác (b. 1920)	Czechoslovakia	<i>Las Tres Gracias</i>
Koshi Takahashi (1925-1996)	Japan	<i>Esferas</i>
Pierre Székely (1923-1901)	France / Hungary	<i>El Sol Bípedo</i>
Gonzalo Fonseca (1922-1997)	Uruguay	<i>Torre de los Vientos</i>
Constantino Nivola (1911-1988)	Italy / United States	<i>Sin Titulo</i>
Jacques Moeschal (1913-2005)	Belgium	<i>Sin Titulo</i>
Todd Williams (b. 1939)	United States	<i>Sin Titulo</i>
Grzegorz Kowalski (b. 1942)	Poland	<i>Reloj Solar</i>
Jose Maria Subirachs (b. 1927)	Spain	<i>Mexico</i>
Clement Meadmore (1929-2005)	Australia	<i>Sin Titulo</i>
Herbert Bayer (1900-1985)	United States / Austria	<i>Muro Articulado</i>
Joop J. Beljon (1922-2002)	The Netherlands	<i>Tertulia de Gigantes</i>
Itzhak Danziger (1916-1977)	Israel	<i>Puerta de Paz</i>
Olivier Séguin (b. 1927)	France	<i>Sin Titulo</i>
Mohamed Melehi (b. 1936)	Morocco	<i>Sin Titulo</i>
Jorge Dubón (1936-2005)	México	<i>Sin Titulo</i>
Helen Escobedo (b. 1934)	México	<i>Puerta al Viento</i>

Table 1: Artists of the *Route of Friendship*

Aside from these artists, whose sculptures were present on the *Route of Friendship*, the Cultural Olympic team had as guest of honor Alexander Calder (1898-1976) whose monumental steel sculpture *Sol Rojo* is located on the grounds of the

National Stadium. The other guest artist was German Cueto (1893-1975) who created a bronze sculpture titled *Hombre Corriendo*. Mathias Goeritz, creator and coordinator of the whole project, contributed with a group of seven columns as a sculptural constellation titled *La Osa Mayor (The Big Dipper)* that was placed on the grounds of the Sports Palace.⁵ Calder's and Goeritz's sculptures became the iconic images of their respective sports facilities.

The medium that Goeritz chose for the sculptures of the *Route* was reinforced concrete, which had played an important role in the modernity of Mexico. Cement, and especially reinforced concrete, flourished in the 1920s. After nearly a decade of civil war, cement quickly emerged as the government's preferred building material for its projects, including schools, office, buildings, factories, markets and stadiums. Goeritz's ideas about monumental urban sculpture were about merging the work with nature; he did not need background for his sculpture, he actually wanted for his sculptures to be the background; Goeritz did not want to interfere, but wanted to enhance what was already there. It was not a question of being unassuming but of joining his creativity to that of the environment on its own terms, much as light, color, shadows, mist and rainbows do, in their own time and in their own way, affecting the onlooker, altering perceptions, transforming surfaces and causing variations of depth, illusion and heightened perspective. There were several of the sculptures that were unique to what had been created up until then. For example, Gonzalo Fonseca's contribution to the *Route of Friendship* was more of a building than a sculpture. It was designed for visiting rather than just viewing and it constitutes a very early example of sculpture that is more about being experienced and not just seen as an object. Near each site there was a place to park

cars and a path to the sculpture so that interested drivers could leave their cars and view the sculptures at leisure. Unfortunately this feature was lost years ago with the uncontrollable growth of the city.

Mathias Goeritz (1915-1990) was a German artist who was a true Renaissance man. He was a visual artist, architect, sculptor and writer who also held a doctoral degree in Art History. He arrived in Mexico in 1949 and the country became his adopted land until he died in 1990. Because of his abstract work, Goeritz was publicly attacked in the early 1950s by Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros as an agent of “the School of Paris, Imperialist Abstractionist, and Neo-Portirist.”⁶ Goeritz’s designs and ideas were so different from what was being created at that time that the debate about his work is understandable. Works from Goeritz like the futurist *Satellite Towers* became an instant icon of modern Mexico City and according to Juan Bruce-Novoa, “they rivaled *Ciudad Universitaria* as a representational image assuming the status of national metaphor.”⁷ The architecture that would come to be recognized internationally as the Mexican style has more in common with Goeritz’s *Towers* than to any of the other major state buildings.⁸ Goeritz alone would change the face of sculpture in his adopted country, by trying to recapture the magnitude and solemnity of ancient pre-Columbian art and adding different contemporary formal elements. In language closely resembling the ideologically absurd Marxist nationalist rhetoric favored by Rivera, artist Juan O’Gorman wrote in 1953 that abstract architecture, like abstract painting, was immoral and un-Mexican. It failed to communicate essential truths. It represented, he said,

the denial of realism; it has no action of any kind on the popular masses, to which it is completely indifferent, strange and unknown, has no social human base and is performed only as the intellectualization of conditions that

do not solve in any way the collective needs; [it is] the denial of what is Mexican, and its domineering characteristic lies in its imitative condition of what is foreign. Only those who are proud of being a dependent colonial, or for whom it means a situation of privilege, can be proud of this.⁹

Behind the attacks against Goeritz was the question of national identity. The idea of national identity is a construct, a mutable, fictional unity masking real internal variance and conflict. Each generation reconfigures this construct according to its own multifaceted needs and aspirations, and at various times the process becomes more or less emotional, complicated, and pervasive. In Mexico, in the decade and a half following World War II, as its northern neighbor, the USA, rose to international military, political, economic, and (arguably) cultural preeminence, and much of the rest of the world chose sides in the Cold War, this process of cultural configuration took on particular intensity, resulting in what anthropologist Roger Bartra has called “an extraordinary boom” in speculations about Mexican national identity.¹⁰ Artists, intellectuals, and politicians in Mexico debated what philosopher and historian Paul Ricoeur would at this same time call the core problem of post-colonial societies: that of balancing modernization and a role in contemporary “universal civilization” with the need to “return to sources,” to recover and assert a personality distinct from that imposed by the colonizer.¹¹

From the utopian dream of collaboration the *Route of Friendship*, Goertiz would not come out in good terms and he had to accept much criticism. At the end of the project, only one artist from Africa (Morocco) was included out of the expected three; one from Japan who represented the whole Asian continent and the heaviest weight of artists came from Europe with ten represented artists. Among other accomplishments, he was able to achieve the inclusion of the work of two Mexican women artists. *The Route*

of Friendship is one of the first major cultural and artistic contemporary encounters between Latin America, Europe, Africa, Asia and the USA that resulted in the creation of a permanent sculpture installation. With all his shortcomings, the project is considered to be a success and that is due in big part to the figure of Mathias Goeritz. His artistic networks were extremely well-established across Latin America, Europe and the USA. Due in part to all of his travels, international projects, being collaborator in different magazines and his knowledge of several languages, provided Goeritz with all the resources to bring internationally renowned sculptors to the Symposium and then to the final selection of sculptors. The *Route* is considered the longest sculptural corridor in the world and some of the sculptures have been gradually restored after many years of neglect, although unfortunately many are in need of repairs and relocation. Most of them are now surrounded by bridges, second floor highways, high-rises and the visual impact of the works has suffered. With the advent of the automobile and more importantly the use of highways by the general population, Goeritz was one of the first to recognize the need to develop Urban Art. Ironically, he did not count on the indiscriminate growth of the city, which now threatens to consume the sculptures.

In retrospect, and in the words of Goeritz stated in an article written in 1970, he admitted that the project was too ambitious.

The intention of giving the event a universal, humanistic quality and of gathering persons from all over the world made us face a series of extra artistic considerations which caused us many special problems. Due to a lack of adequate personal contacts in the international world, we sometimes had to seek recommendations and help from official institutions; however, we investigated each case before making an invitation. Nevertheless, some sculptors, whom I considered especially qualified, remained outside the program, while others were invited because they

fulfilled certain prerequisites, which were not exclusively related to their work.¹²

Goeritz also acknowledged the absurdity in erecting sculptures alongside a road, thus transforming it into an outdoor gallery. The original aim of redesigning the entire road to make it one unique artistic work could not be achieved in the time available. Goeritz blames his stubbornness in not wanting to give up the idea of a sculpture road and in retrospect thought that it was a mistake. His goal was to bring art to the streets; the sculptures were part of city life and they were enjoyed by their citizens for many years. With the explosive growth of the city, only a few are now accessible.

One of the questions that this essay has try to answer is the shift in institutionalized aesthetics that occurred at this moment in Mexican history; that is the fact that the major aesthetic project of the Mexican Olympic Games presented to the world was restricted to sculpted abstract forms as opposed to figurative painting. As discussed in many newspapers around the world, and specifically in the New York Times, “The Olympic Games in Mexico City are not all about rowing and discus throwing. Culture as it did with the ancient Greeks, is getting equal time.”¹³ It is after all the first games where the closing ceremony was transmitted in color to the entire world. As is the case in every major world event, the host country wants to show their most creative, forward thinking face. We were all witness of this strategy just last year with Beijing’s Summer Olympic Games.

Ten days before the inauguration of the summer Olympics in 1968, Mexican university students organized a democratic movement, publicly demanding civil liberties and human rights from the authoritarian Díaz Ordaz regime. A series of clashes between students and the riot police precipitated the violence in the plaza of *Tlatelolco* where

scores of civilian demonstrators were murdered, wounded, and imprisoned by the Mexican military. The government-led assault exposed the limits of Mexican Constitutional Democracy leading many to question the established parameters of official power and the State's lack of accountability for crimes committed against the general populace.

When these events were taking place Goeritz was immersed in one of his largest projects: *The Route of Friendship*. The artist was the creator of the concept, collaborator and coordinator of the art section of the 1968 Olympiad. The project *The Route of Friendship* was bittersweet for him. On one hand he was honored with the distinction of creating the contemporary artistic image of the country that would be broadcast to the world. After being attacked fourteen years before, his work was being recognized and had won the respect of most of his critics who realized the importance of Goeritz's contributions to the Cultural Olympiad. On the other hand the student movement had a violent and deadly outcome. For Mathias Goeritz who had escaped the violence of World War II it was devastating, and likely cast a shadow over the project that was to be his crowning achievement.

Notes

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- ¹ Karen Wendl. "The Route of Friendship: A Cultural/Artistic Event of the Games of the XIX Olympiad in Mexico City – 1968," *OLYMPIKA: The International Journal of Olympic Studies*, Volume VII 1998, 124.
- ² Mathias Goeritz, "The Route of Friendship: Sculpture." *Leonardo*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Oct., 1970), pp. 397-407.
- ³ Donald Appleyard. *The View from the Road*, Boston: MIT Press, 1966. While doing research at the artist's archives in Mexico City I was able to see Goeritz's own annotations to the book mentioned above.
- ⁴ Andrew Causey. "Sculpture since 1945." Oxford: University Press, 1998: 20.
- ⁵ The sculptures varied in height with the tallest measuring 50 feet high.
- ⁶ "Neo-Porfirists" refers to native-born, Francophile dictator Porfirio Diaz, overthrown in Mexico's 1910 Revolution.
- ⁷ Juan Bruce-Novoa, "Mathias Goeritz: Emotional Architecture and Creating a Mexican National Art" in Good, Carl and John V. Waldron, Ed. *The Effects of the Nation: Mexican Art in an age of Globalization*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001.
- ⁸ Luis Barragan, the world renowned architect and partner of Goeritz in many projects, mostly built private houses.
- ⁹ Juan O'Gorman, "Que significa socialmente la arquitectura moderna en México?" *Espacios*, 15 (1953) in Eggener, Keith L. "Contrasting images of identity in the Post-War Mexican Architecture of Luis Barragán and Juan O'Gorman." *Journal of Latin American cultural studies*, vol. 9, No. 1, 2000: 36-37.
- ¹⁰ Roger Bartra, *The Cage of Melancholy: Identity and Metamorphosis in the Mexican Character*, trans. By Christopher J. Hall (New Brunswick: Rutgers U. Press, 1992: 5.
- ¹¹ See Paul Ricoeur, "Universal Civilizations and National Cultures," in *History and Truth*, trans. by Charles A. Kelbley. Evanston: Northwestern University Press: 1965.
- ¹² Mathias Goeritz, "The Route of Friendship: Sculpture." *Leonardo*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Oct., 1970) 403.
- ¹³ Grace Glueck. *The New York Times*. July 21, 1968.

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This paper seeks to demonstrate how three artists on the margins of their respective countries' artistic centers maintained an intimate dialogue through mail art. Paulo Bruscky and Leonhard Frank Duch of Recife, Brazil, and Edgardo Antonio Vigo of La Plata, Argentina, exchanged letters and artworks through the mail over the course of twenty years, beginning in the mid-1970s and ending only with Vigo's death in 1997. Although their styles, methods, and approaches to mail art differ greatly, their intentions converge in several key series of works that posit art as life, primarily through a poetics of displacement. Vigo displaces the static art object with open calls to participatory action; Bruscky uses the literal traces of his own body to displace the hermetic artwork; and Duch dispels the myth of the artist-genius by representations of his everyday activities as art. Ultimately, each artist's approach offers insight into the diverse modes of conceiving and creating mail art in Latin America.

Vigo, Bruscky and Duch's mail art friendship was as intimate as their production was disparate. Yet, in Vigo's "*señalamientos*" or signaling series and "*proyectos para realizar*" or "projects to be realized," in Bruscky's hospital pieces, and in Duch's "I AM AN ARTIST" works, all three artists attempt to erase the boundaries between art and life. These series elucidate each artist's personal world view and, at the same time, they demonstrate the varied possibilities for making mail art into an exercise of freedom during an era of intense political turmoil under military dictatorships.

From Margin to Margin and Back Again:
Paulo Bruscky, Leonhard Frank Duch, and Edgardo Antonio Vigo's Mail Art Practice
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This paper seeks to demonstrate how three artists on the margins of their respective countries' artistic centers maintained an intimate dialogue through mail art. Paulo Bruscky and Leonhard Frank Duch of Recife, Brazil, and Edgardo Antonio Vigo of La Plata, Argentina, exchanged letters and artworks through the mail over the course of twenty years, beginning in the mid-1970s and ending only with Vigo's death in 1997. Although their styles, methods, and approaches to mail art differ greatly, their intentions converge in several key series of works that posit art as life, primarily through a poetics of displacement. Vigo displaces the static art object with open calls to participatory action; Bruscky uses the literal traces of his own body to displace the hermetic artwork; and Duch dispels the myth of the artist-genius by representations of his everyday activities as art. Ultimately, each artist's approach offers insight into the diverse modes of conceiving and creating mail art in Latin America.

Vigo, Bruscky and Duch's mail art friendship was as intimate as their production was disparate. Whereas Vigo's mailings were polished prints, Bruscky often relied on hospital equipment to render images of his body from inside out, and Duch preferred to use xeroxed images upon which he would print free-hand and rubber-stamped messages. While Vigo made a clear distinction between his correspondence and his mailed artworks, Bruscky mailed terse notes on altered postcards, and Duch wrote lengthy letters on the back sides of his xeroxed images. And whereas Vigo wrote numerous theoretical texts on mail art, Bruscky was more concerned with staging exhibitions and poetry festivals, and Duch participated as a free spirit, stamping his envelopes with slogans like "Duchpost," "*Sea*

Duchista,” and “I am Duch, not Duchamp!” Yet, in Vigo’s “*señalamientos*” or signaling series and “*proyectos para realizar*” or “projects to be realized,” in Bruscky’s hospital and *Natureza Postal* or *Postal Nature* pieces, and in Duch’s “I AM AN ARTIST” works, all three artists attempt to erase the boundaries between art and life. These series elucidate each artist’s personal world view and, at the same time, they demonstrate the varied possibilities for making mail art into an exercise of freedom during an era of intense political turmoil under military dictatorships.

Presenting art as life was nothing new in the mid-1970s: Duchamp’s ready-mades opened the door to a host of precedents, from John Cage to Fluxus and the Nouveaux Realistes to Argentine Alberto Greco, to name just a few. But the notion of art as life was a novelty among South American mail artists, most of who used the mail as a vehicle for sharing poems, drawings, rubber-stamped pieces and altered postcards. Vigo, Bruscky, and Duch used these media, too, but were more interested in diverse strategies that turned life into the subject of their art. In their projects, art literally took shape as life: whether proposed as action for willing participants, reflected in processes that revealed the inner workings of the body, or posited as representations of everyday events, art was but a frame for life itself.

These three artists also shared the conviction that art should be kept out of official institutional frameworks and far beyond the commercial gallery circuit. As Vigo wrote to Bruscky in a letter dated November 7th, 1977: “We must collaborate amongst ourselves, it’s the way to create the HUMAN CIRCUIT that is indispensable for our own defense and in addition it gives us more and more strength. It is fundamental if we want to fight against certain structures that have left art in a total divorce from its own essence, [a situation in

which] a CV, performance, [and] the valorization of his work in the market is more important for an artist than his actual activity and his commitment to the content of his work.”¹ Mail art was the ideal format for this escape from institutional confines, as Vigo expressed in another letter to Bruscky dated April 27th of the same year. Thanking Bruscky for his last letter which was “full of enthusiasm and principles that we fully share,” Vigo states: “The marginal communication media are at this moment waging a great battle, and within this great tendency that claims to break down resistance and really make a creative act on all levels, and of course massively, mail art is fundamental, because I believe that like nothing else it incarnates and faces in the best way the possibility of other territories where, like it or not, the defenders of the System must surrender.”² This statement has a markedly political tone, but, as Vigo goes on to elucidate in his letter, the System he is fighting against is that which alienates art from viewers by placing it in an institutional context.

Vigo, the foremost pioneer of mail art in South America, strove to overcome the gap between art and audience by making receivers of his mail art into co-creators of the works. For example, his *Obras (in)completas*, or *(In) Complete Works* of 1969, sent through the mail to artists and friends near and far away, consists of four printed labels meant to be affixed to any objects recipients deemed worthy of art status. The accompanying instructions specify that, “in line with the theory of participation art, a certain percentage of the creation is transferred to wherever you wish to place them”: a kind of do-it-yourself kit for creating ready-mades, the work transforms former spectators into collaborators in processes of Duchampian designation.

Vigo's *señalamientos*, begun in 1968, takes this process in a new direction. As stated in the manifesto that accompanied the first of these signalings, the *Manojo de semáforos* or *Cluster of Streetlights* of 1968, this series aimed "not to REPRESENT but rather to PRESENT" objects that were not "'sheltered' or 'hidden' in museums and galleries"³ but present in the urban landscape for all to appreciate. The *Cluster of Streetlights* event, which took place on the 25th of October at 8:00 pm on the corner of 1st Avenue and 60th Street in La Plata, was publicized through mailings, radio broadcasts, and in the newspaper over the course of 20 days. Its goal was to produce a simple contemplation of the streetlights, a "gratuitous act of esthetic investigation"⁴ in which the artist himself would not be present so as not to influence the act of appreciation of this everyday monument.

The *Paseo visual a la Plaza Rubén Darío*, or the *Visual Stroll through the Plaza Rubén Darío* was Vigo's fifth signaling piece, and it occurred within the context of the Buenos Aires' Centro de Arte y Comunicación or CAYC's *Escultura, Follaje, y Ruidos* or *Sculpture, Foliage, and Noise* exhibition in November 1970. Sent by mail and handed out to passersby, this piece simply proposed that participants mark with chalk a small area in a public park and make a 360 degree turn within it: "register within yourself what you have seen, and make your conclusions: in the end, you will have realized a *Visual Stroll through the Plaza Rubén Darío*."⁵ Suggested variations—enacting the turn standing on tip-toe, crouching, or, impossibly, stretched out flat on the ground—were meant to engender different perspectives. Regardless of their chosen orientation, all participants were entitled to a badge emblazoned with a red "V," the sign or brand of Vigo, a certification of artistic legitimacy that finds parallels in Yves Klein's "Zones of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility,"

Piero Manzoni's "art certificates," and fellow Argentine Alberto Greco's own "*dedo vivo*" or "living finger" art, begun only a few years earlier. On the other hand, in their celebration of physical movement and everyday life as raw material for esthetic experience, as well as their cultivation of chance and indeterminacy as crucial components, such signalings are akin to John Cage's landmark 4'33" or "silent piece" of 1952 and to the Fluxus "event scores" born of Cagean influence during the early 1960s.

Vigo's 1971 *Señalamiento de tu mano*, or *Signaling of Your Hand*, was the 7th in the series and sent exclusively by mail. Upon receiving the card with finger-size holes, participants were invited to "introduce into each hole a finger of your hand [...] and thus made independent, CONTEMPLATE THEM!!!"⁶ Variations could be made by looking at one's hand "in different light sources and independent movement of each finger."⁷ This, the simplest and most evocative of Vigo's interactive signalings, clearly equated art with life by making the viewer's body the actual object of contemplation.

Vigo's "projects to be realized" are the most demonstrative of his participatory esthetic. He began forging a theoretical framework for such projects in his self-published *De la poesía/proceso a la poesía para y/o realizar* or *From Process/Poetry to Poetry to be and/or Realized* of 1969. He writes: "The possibility of art is no longer only in the participation of the observer, but rather in her constructive-ACTIVATION in an ART-TO-BE-REALIZED that has burned down divisions between inherited genres and proceeds toward a goal of total integration."⁸ In this new paradigm, artists no longer merely present audiences with interactive works. They become "programmers of projects" who spur participants to "move from the category of consumer to that of creator."⁹ The projects themselves could take many forms, so long as they are "most

modifiable, allowed for changes, replacements, and additions, either of materials or of formal structures that foster play,” and engender “the truly active (and unconditional) participation of the spectator.”¹⁰

Vigo’s 1973 *Acciones interconectadas por secuencias*, or *Actions Interconnected by Means of Sequences* perfectly encapsulate this esthetic. The first reads: “Turn around. Look for points of reference at [sic] your choice. Memorize all seen during the 360 degrees of the vision. Statically, repeat the circle by ‘VISUALIZATION-MEMORY.’ To rub out the images, open your eyes and turn around in the opposite direction.”¹¹ Though reminiscent of his *Paseo Visual de la Plaza Rubén Darío*, this proposal enables the participant to execute the proposed action whenever and wherever she wishes. The same can be said of the three remaining actions: the second, *Modification by Soaking*, calls for participants to catch the atmosphere in their hands and “soak” what they have captured; the third, *Come and Go*, invites recipients to cross the street and take a visual “inventory of things”; and the fourth involves hitch-hiking and assessing the time it takes to move from one place to another and back again. These ephemeral actions are intended to make participants aware of their surroundings by the simplest means, urging them to contemplate the urban fabric they traverse daily in a new light. Once again, life here comes to the fore as the subject of Vigo’s art, as participants become aware of everyday elements they take for granted.

Bruscky presented a similar series of propositions in 1980 in his *Intervenções Urbanas/Exercícios para a Cidade*, or *Urban Interferences/Exercises for the City*, but in this case flyers were handed out to passersby and published in the newspaper rather than sent through the mail, and the instructions for the participants’ action was more highly

structured. For instance, participants were asked to walk to the São Cristóvão building in Recife while reading something, then stop reading and cross to the other side of the building. In this exercise, according to Bruscky, “The most important thing is to know how to see, and not to do.”¹²

While many of Bruscky’s own actions and artworks focused on urban space, a large part of his mail art was a window onto the inner workings of the body. His day job at the Hospital Agamenon Magalhães afforded him access to machines that enabled him literally to make art from and about life. For example, for his *O Meu Cerebro Desenha Assim*, or *My Brain Draws in this Way*, of 1976, Bruscky used the hospital’s electroencephalogram machine to trace his brain waves. Sent as a small booklet, and also developed as a film piece, each page of undulating lines turn the artist’s own brain activity into an abstract composition. In 1980 he developed a project he called *Registros* or *Registers* to make such brain waves into a concert of “electroencephalographic music,” in which each page would be transformed into a musical score and “each patient would be a composer and all the compositions would be different.”¹³ Though never realized, such proposals, too, are reminiscent of Fluxus and John Cage’s approach to art.

On the other hand, Bruscky’s *Autum Radium Retratum* series, begun in 1976, equated art with life by generating trace images of his body. Using the hospital’s x-ray machine on different parts of his own body, Bruscky sent the resulting x-ray prints to mail artists around the world. The envelopes in which these pieces were sent harbor clues to their content, as Bruscky made smaller stamps of such x-ray imagery to paste on the outside of his mailings. Unsettling, these images evoke human frailty, as x-rays are usually used to detect broken bones and other illnesses and dental x-rays are used to

identify human remains, at the same time that they affirm the actual body as the stuff of art.

In addition to these hospital pieces, Bruscky's *Natureza Postal*, or *Postal Nature*, series of 1978 encouraged recipients to use their olfactory and tactile senses when opening their mail. For instance, on the verso of one letter, Bruscky writes, "This envelope contains the smell of the beach at Saõ José da Coroa Grande." Inside, one finds a clump of seaweed fresh from the beach, a metonymic fragment standing in for the whole of the beach experience. Upon other such mailings, Bruscky writes: "Open and smell: the first memory is art."¹⁴

While Bruscky made the body the subject of his art, Duch chose to present his everyday life as an all-encompassing artistic endeavor, thus displacing the mythic image of the artist-genius at work in his studio by of one of the artist realizing everyday actions outside of it. *Arte = Vida* was his motto, and it appears stamped on almost all of his correspondence.

Duch wrote frequently to Vigo about the significance of mail art in his life. For example, on the 8th of April, 1981, Duch writes: "For me, mail art has a function, an importance for me that you cannot imagine. I changed my behavior; I'm not the same Leo as ten years ago. Mail art opened my head and my mouth and my heart. It opened my whole being. It broke all my introspective and solitary silence."¹⁵ He goes on to differentiate mail art's role among artists in the first world and in developing countries: "I think that in Europe and the United States the problem is a bit different. There, there is no vital necessity for communication as in our Latin America, marginal by its very nature. For me, mail art was the only way out for my creativity and for my life."¹⁶

He also expresses his frustration at the conservative artistic scene in Recife. “Recife is very poor,” he writes Vigo on the 1st of February 1981, “and nothing happens here.”¹⁷ Several years later he expresses the same sentiments even more forcefully. On the 6th of July, 1987, he writes to Vigo: “The political situation couldn’t be worse and the economy is a mess, there no longer exists the minimum possibility of having at the very least a dignified life. It’s all shit and as if that weren’t enough, they still shit upon the shit and then do it all over again. To make art...here... what for? for whom?”¹⁸ Mail art was Duch’s escape from this gloomy situation, and Vigo, a true ally, even though the two artists never met. “Men like you, Vigo,” he writes on the 14th of May, 1988, “are what keep my hopes up.”¹⁹

Nevertheless, Duch was forever frustrated by the lack of recognition he received as a mail artist. Hence his “I AM AN ARTIST” series, a body of work that defines art as life itself. Any daily activity was fair game. For example, in one work he presents himself in xeroxed photographs playing with his youngest child; in another, he is walking through the streets of Recife, stretched out on the grass for a nap, and drinking a bottle of beer; in another he is seen horsing around with a cement mixer; and in yet another he is seen drinking alone at a bar—all images are stamped in red with the slogan “I AM AN ARTIST.” As Duch wrote for an exhibition of his work included in the “Six Mail Artists” show held at the Stempelplaats in Amsterdam in 1980: “All my mail-art work in the last years has been based on the cultural reality I LIVE. By ‘I AM AN ARTIST’ I mean a state of anguish. Agony. It’s dangerous to be an artist in my country. But I am an artist. And I have to say it aloud, by shouting. I AM AN ARTIST.”²⁰ Duch’s statement conveys the dangers of acting as a dissenting artist under a military dictatorship notorious for

persecution and censorship, but mail art was also his way of escaping isolation and engaging a new audience.

Other images in the series feature Duch giving a faux interview on a television screen, stamped with the words “Yes... I AM AN ARTIST... unemployed.” Another image depicts him sitting in a lawn chair reading the paper, with the penned captions “Humm...here is an announcement... for a bureaucratic job...I AM AN ARTIST,” all beneath the stamped header, “Unemployed.” This contradiction between his insistent claim to be an artist and the word “unemployed” suggests that it was not enough to be a mail artist to be considered a productive member of society. Indeed, Vigo had a day job in the Ministry of Justice in La Plata, Bruscky worked at the Hospital Agamenon Magalhães, and Duch eventually found work as a factory manager, but mail art (and for Bruscky, many other projects) took up most of their free time.

Doubly marginalized, as South American artists working outside traditional artistic centers like Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Vigo, Bruscky, and Duch used mail art as a lifeline to the world beyond the margins. Whether proposing activities that participants could execute in real time and space, sending images of real life processes and body parts, or mailing xeroxed photographs of everyday activities, these three artists worked where life and art intersect. Though Vigo never met Bruscky or Duch in person, the relationships they developed were intimate and long-lasting. As Vigo signed off in a letter to Bruscky dated May 15th, 1978, “fraternal greetings to Duch, his daughter, and for Unhandejara [Lisboa], drink a beer together and place an empty glass on the table, you can be certain that I will be inside of it accompanying you.”²¹

¹ Letter from Vigo to Bruscky dated November 7, 1977, in Bruscky archive. Emphasis in the original.

² Letter from Vigo to Bruscky dated April 27, 1977. Bruscky archive.

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- ³ Vigo, Manifesto for *Manojo de semáforos*, 1968.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Vigo, *Paseo visual a la Plaza Rubén Darío*, 1970.
- ⁶ Vigo, *Señalamiento de tu mano*, 1971.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Vigo, *De la poesía/proceso a la poesía para y/o realizar*, 1969. Self published. In Vigo archive. Emphasis in the original.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Vigo, *Acciones interconectadas por secuencias*, 1973. Vigo's translation. Emphasis in the original.
- ¹² Cited by Cristina Freire, *Paulo Bruscky: Arte, Archivo, e Utopia* (Recife: Companhia Editorial de Pernambuco, 2008), 234.
- ¹³ Ibid., 228.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 253.
- ¹⁵ Letter from Duch to Vigo dated April 8th, 1981. Vigo archive.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Letter from Duch to Vigo dated February 1st, 1981. Vigo archive.
- ¹⁸ Letter from Duch to Vigo dated July 6th, 1987. Vigo archive.
- ¹⁹ Letter from Duch to Vigo dated May 14th, 1988. Vigo archive.
- ²⁰ Catalogue for "Six Mail Artists" (Amsterdam: Stempelplaats, 1980), unpaginated. Emphasis in the original.
- ²¹ Letter from Vigo to Bruscky dated May 15th, 1978. Bruscky archive.

Vanessa Davidson, Biographical Statement

Vanessa Katherine Davidson is a Fulbright Scholar studying at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts. She is currently writing her Ph.D. dissertation, tentatively titled "The Pioneering Works of Edgardo Antonio Vigo and Paulo Bruscky: Alternative Communication Networks, Conceptual Art, and Performance (1960s-1980s)," under the direction of Robert Storr and Edward Sullivan. She received her MA from the Institute in 2004, and her BA from Harvard College in 1999. She has worked at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, as the Curatorial Assistant for the Art of the Ancient Americas collection, and at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, as the Exhibition Assistant for *The Colonial Andes: Tapestries and Silverwork, 1530-1830*. She has published articles about artists from Latin America in *Anamesa Journal*, *Romance Studies*, and *Art and Antiques*. Her research interests include conceptual art in the Americas, mail art, transnational artistic interchange, and art and politics in Latin America.

Zanna Gilbert

Abstract: Between Intimacy and Instrumentality: the Genesis of Mail Art Exhibitions in South America

This paper addresses the role of exhibitions in the shift from an intimate, hermetic practice to the public and instrumental use of the mail art network. The purpose of the paper is to explore and analyse the role of mail art exhibitions in Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina and the effect of key artists and their exhibitions on the development of mail art.¹ Firstly, I explore the relationship between private and public from mail art's conception in New York to its later internationalisation, considering how exhibitions figure within this apparent dichotomy. Secondly, I examine the structure and principles of mail art exhibitions and the international links that these exhibitions created. Finally, I consider mail art's transnational character and argue that the shift from the private to the public was partly chronological rather than only regional. This interpretation presents a challenge to notions of Latin American art as 'ideological' not only by contesting that blanket term, but also by asserting the politicisation of mail artists worldwide.

Zanna Gilbert

Between Intimacy and Instrumentality: the Genesis of Mail Art Exhibitions in South America

In proposing this paper I was interested that, despite the obvious advantage that mail art could fly under the radar of the censors, mail artists living under dictatorships in South America continued to organise public and often contentious exhibitions. In some cases these provoked the wrath of the military police. Ilan Stavans reflects that 'at a time when pluralism is at its shakiest, there is magnetism in the tension between expression and repression.'¹ This statement may explain the number of exhibitions organised by mail artists in the 1970s and 1980s in South America – a desire to provoke participation in the public realm. Indeed, in 1976 Paulo Bruscky wrote that mail art's principal functions were 'information, protest and denunciation'.² However, in the course of this research a still more complex picture has emerged which suggests that motivations for mounting mail art exhibitions existed at a number of levels – artistic, social and political; that the interplay of these ideas developed transnationally, and that the ideological character of mail art was no more pronounced in South America than elsewhere until at least the mid 1970s.

This paper addresses the role of exhibitions in the shift from an intimate, hermetic practice to the public and instrumental use of the mail art network. The purpose of the paper is to explore and analyse the role of mail art exhibitions in Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina and the effect of key artists and their exhibitions on the development of mail art.³ Firstly, I explore the relationship between private and public from mail art's conception in New York to its later internationalisation, considering how exhibitions figure within this apparent dichotomy. Secondly, I examine the structure and principles of mail art exhibitions and the international links that these exhibitions created. Finally, I consider mail art's transnational character and argue that the shift from the private to the public was partly chronological rather than only regional. This interpretation presents a challenge to notions of Latin American art as 'ideological' not only by contesting that blanket term, but also by asserting the politicisation of mail artists worldwide.

What is at stake in the shift between the private and public marked by mail art exhibitions? The first flourishes of artistic communities were initially closed circuits. In his book, *Correspondence Art*, Michael Crane asserts that the mail art of the 1960s – established by Fluxus artists in New York - was created with an 'aim to establish a community and a new social realism via group action'⁴ but this was a closed community which was, according to Ken Friedman, 'quite content to create private works'.⁵ The opening out of the network began in the 1970s but even in the 1980s some mail artists based in New York emphasised the private character of mail art in a series of radio interviews.⁶ Carlo Pittore, for example, stated that he could only send his magazine 'to colleagues, other artists who are interested in concerns that all correspondence artists share',⁷ while Mark Bloch added that 'the most natural audience is other artists'.⁸

Another New York artist, David Cole, spoke of his misgivings about exhibiting: 'the real history of mail art is much more in the exchange of art between artists...and the exhibits have been coming along more strongly lately, either as new people enter into the group or for various reasons of putting things together for the public.'⁹ Cole's comments speak of a closed group with little concern for seeking out a public and these artists reject the idea that exhibitions can be central to the practice of mail art.¹⁰ This prioritisation of intimate exchange is particular to the New York mail art scene, although it should be noted that New Yorker Ray Johnson, widely regarded as the founder of mail art and known for his contradictory actions, often contributed to mail art exhibitions and organised his own in 1970. These New York mail artists also displayed a distrust of cheap reproduction techniques, referring to photocopying as 'a necessary evil' opposed to the intimate, crafted character of the work.¹¹ Meanwhile mail artists elsewhere celebrated photocopying as a democratic innovation vital to the free circulation of information. There is also evidence of a debate between European mail artists and those from the United States. At least some European mail artists considered US mail art to be immature and nihilistic. Swiss artist Hans Ruedi Fricker criticised mail artists from the US for their lack of social and moral content: 'When American artists say 'we play', they create toys...Europeans play with the reality, that's the difference.'¹²

The values of mail artists in other locations were very different. It would be unthinkable to hear such comments from an artist working in South America at this time but this disparity can be understood within the context of the New York art scene. Géza Perneczky has noted the particularity of that scene, which continued to be more closed after the 'opening out' of the rest of the network.¹³ The belief that 'art is private and small and individual'¹⁴ was anti-establishment in New York because those artists lived in an art centre dominated by market values. By reverting to a decommodified exchange between individuals they denied the rampant commercialism of the New York art world. The attempt to escape their environment through a hermetic art practice that asserted human communication as gift-giving rather than commercial exchange was an antidote to their surroundings. In New York, the excess of information led to a withdrawal from this profane public sphere to a private practice that was seen as sacred and intimate.

The rejection of exhibitions by artists in New York was a direct rejection of the mainstream art world meaning that this network model did not embrace the transformative potential of the mail art exhibition. Operating within a fairly closed circuit and rejecting interaction with any kind of public, their anti-establishment motivations led to a withdrawal. In contrast, the extreme lack of freedom of information typical of military rule in South America led to a desire and a need for public practice because of, and despite, the practice of censorship. Unable to show their work in official art circuits and deeply aware of a lack, rather than a saturation of information, they turned to exhibitions and urban interventions.

It was in fact Ken Friedman, the coordinator of Fluxus West in California, who effected the initial internationalisation of the mail art movement by organising

international mailing lists, publications and exhibitions.¹⁵ Friedman also organised one of the first mail art exhibitions in 1970, *Omaha Flow Systems*. indeed, the private approach advocated by the New York mail artists is rejected by the work of other North Americans as well as Europeans and South Americans. Friedman comments, making a distinction between correspondence and mail art, that these public efforts 'embodied not only correspondence art but a larger and admittedly less private mail art. It was at this time (late 1960s) that mail art first created, and began to make real its potential for social change and for contributing new forms of community to the world.'¹⁶

So, if by the late 1960s and early 1970s the possibilities of a more instrumental mail art network were becoming clearer to some, it was in terms of the concepts of 'community' or and 'social change' rather than radical political protest and denunciation. These concerns were echoed globally by artists with the inclination to deal with social, ethical and political issues.

Craig J Saper's notion of 'intimate bureaucracies' in relation to 'networked art' is useful to tease out some of the ideas about public and private in mail art. The inherent paradox in this term reflects one of the central contradictions or dualisms of mail art: its ability to be both private and public - a network of individual exchanges, but a network nonetheless. Debates about whether mail art should be personal or political are rendered null in the light of this acknowledgement. The postal system itself is a constructed public space used for private communication.¹⁷ Saper suggests that 'the strategic parodies of bureaucratic discourse do not suggest a complete rejection of bureaucratic values; rather, these works mirror the performance of a well-oiled corporation'.¹⁸ While the assertion that mail artists ran their network like an international corporation is hard to swallow given the values they celebrate, it is certainly true that some of this art arose from a fascination with networks, systems and ways of creating powerful structures beyond the individual. Moreover, in a time of political strife and oppression, an ability to counter-attack powerful institutions and companies was deeply desirable. Saper argues that 'the poetic practices of assemblings inherently offer alternatives to the preconceived opposition between the artisanal village and the mechanized global society.'¹⁹ Thus neither a utopian vision nor a desire to question institutions could be fully realised by personal exchanges between artists alone. An alternative system subverts a mainstream system by aping it, presenting a utopian version of the original created on the artists' own terms. Artists considered that creating links outside the official communicative structures used for the mass transmission of information was revolutionary.

A survey of the key mail art exhibitions that took place in the 1970s and 1980s in Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil, allows an analysis of the convergent points that characterise their practice and importance. These exhibitions were projects led by the artists themselves and as such, they can be seen as central to their practice. This paper will examine a number of exhibitions curated by Clemente Padín in Montevideo and Berlin; Edgardo Antonio Vigo and Horacio Zabala in Buenos Aires; and Paulo Bruscky, Leonhard Frank Duch, Daniel Santiago and Unhandejara Lisboa in Recife; as well as the

exhibitions steered by the presence of Walter Zanini at the MAC-USP in São Paulo.

Padín organised two major exhibitions of mail art. In 1974 he organised the *Festival de La Postal Creativa* at Gallery U in Montevideo. This is credited as being the first mail art exhibition in Latin America, although mail art had appeared sporadically in exhibitions before.²⁰ The exhibition consisted of artists' postcards and had a wide international participation. Ten years later, in 1984, Padín developed the exhibition *Latin America Hoy* in Berlin's DAADgalerie. *The Last International Exhibition of Mail Art* organised by Edgardo Antonio Vigo and Horacio Zabala in 1975 took place in the Galería Nuevo de Alvaro Castagnino, a small gallery in Buenos Aires. The title of the exhibition was a nod to debates about whether mail art was dead.²¹ Paulo Bruscky organised three major mail art exhibitions in Recife, a city in the north-east of Brazil, removed from the centres of Brazilian art in São Paulo and Rio. Recife became a major centre for mail art as a result of these activities, denying its location as a periphery of a periphery. Bruscky collaborated with Leonard Frank Duch on the *First International Exhibition of Mail Art* held in a local hospital. *The International of Exhibition of Mail Art* was organised at Recife's main post office with Daniel Santiago in 1976. The *III International Exhibition of Mail Art* took place in March 1978 in the Public Library Marechal Humberto Castelo Branco de Recife, the largest library in the state of Pernambuco.

These mail art exhibitions were conceptual propositions, less concerned with each individual object than the processes of communication as a whole. As mail art exhibitions reflect artists' desires to organise the art market and society in a more democratic way, mail art exhibitions all over the world were organised by a series of utopian principles that aimed to counter the idea of the art work as fetishised object. The idea of curatorial selection was rejected, meaning that all works submitted were exhibited. Furthermore there were no jury or prizes, and the exhibitions tended to be organised by the artists themselves rather than by curators on their behalf. Walter Zanini, as the curator of art at the Museum of Contemporary Art in São Paulo, was an exception. The curator made the institution immensely popular with mail artists worldwide, who referred to it as 'Zanini's MAC'. This era was characterised by artist-led collaborations in exhibitions such as *Prospectiva* in 1974 that did not compromise the aims of the mail artists and culminated in the 1981 Arte Postal nucleus at the São Paulo Bienal, curated by Zanini.²²

Aracy Amaral argues that to exhibit postal art in a conventional way is to 'violate this circuit, to neutralise it'²³ and the location of mail art exhibitions is central to this concern. Paulo Bruscky, started his mail art correspondence around 1973. The *First International Exhibition of Mail Art* in 1975, was one of the first mail art exhibitions to be held outside of a museum/gallery context, held in the public and pragmatic space of the Hospital de Lucena, the government hospital where Bruscky worked. The artist tells of how, in the chapel of the hospital, visitors and patients would come into contact with the work whilst contemplating the life-changing events that had brought them there.²⁴ This desire to utilise the what Vigo describes as the 'aesthetics of

surprise'²⁵ - placing art works in unexpected locations - was important to mail artists in the same way that performances and happenings became increasingly central for artists in the 1960s and 1970s. The attempt to increase participation and to stage artistic activity outside of the art world was of foremost significance. Vigo considered the location to be a major failing of *The Last International Exhibition Mail Art*, writing that 'the fact that the exhibition took place in an 'unsuitable place' – an art gallery – reduced the impact on the forewarned artists and public who questioned its validity from various personal points of view.'²⁶ The involvement with a gallery really did compromise the exhibition as the curator of the gallery insisted on the inclusion of a number of high-profile Argentinean artists who never took part in mail art, either before or after the exhibition.²⁷

Not only the location, but the mode of display of the mail works, saw established curatorial practices undermined. Initially most of the exhibitions were not themed, and the only organising principles were by alphabetical order, or by the artist's nationality (or country sent from). Zanini refused to frame any of the works in his mail art shows, which were posted up on boards in a similar manner to posters or advertisements, steering the exhibitions away from displaying the art object as a commodity.²⁸ Curatorial selection and the logic of organisation was discarded. The museum acted as an experimental lab where notions of selection in curating were discarded. These organising principles constituted a critique of the rules of mainstream exhibition practice. Although Clemente Padín's 1974 *Festival de la Poesía Creativa* was in a gallery, his unconventional display allowed for greater participation. Vigo reports of the exhibition:

'The reading of the exhibition presented a new phenomenon, since the cards, which were tied to the ceiling, hung down. The spectator, in addition to touching the work without impediment, could, if he dared, carry away a souvenir.'²⁹

Cristina Freire locates the discourse in Brazilian art at this time around the idea of participation - and this could well be extended to the mail artists discussed here. However she points out that this was a latent discourse that critiqued the lack of freedom in everyday life.³⁰ Hélio Oiticica's ideas about participation, exemplified in his 1960s works *Tropicália*, *Eden* and his *Parangolés*, would have been well known to artists at this time. As Cristina Freire asserts, many artists wanted to 'share creations with the largest number of people possible'.³¹ In this way, artistic experimentation and socio-political aims were synthesised. Bruscky's use of the photocopier for art and his invention of 'Xerox Art' (or 'art that has no original') also echoes these aims which are very different to those proposed by the New York mail artists detailed above. This difference is summed up by Freire, when she states: 'For the artist what matters is the possibility of inserting himself in the daily life in order to create some noise and significance in the social body, that is, in order to make visible the notion of networks and circuits, social aspects that by definition are abstract and invisible.'³² Bruscky's mail art exhibitions as well as his provocative urban interventions advocated participation and the collaboration of passers-by.

The International of Exhibition of Mail Art, organised by Bruscky and Daniel Santiago, was held in the post office of Recife in 1976 and was closed by the police one hour after it opened. Paulo Bruscky sent out a statement notifying the participants that the exhibition 'was suspended not by our wish but by some other kind of wishes'.³³ Beneath the artist's signature, in a parody of a formal gesture, his name is officiously printed. Alongside, the artist's fingerprint alludes obliquely to the surveillance and the military state's control exerted over his body by his arrest. Another part of this leaflet is an obscured photocopy of a leaflet which resembles a political pamphlet – the words 'Consciência del Arte' can be deciphered. According to Fabiane Pianowski, the closure of this exhibition and the imprisonment of the artists 'reverberated internationally, demonstrating dictatorial repression to the world and thereafter the role of denunciation was assumed by Latin American artists.'³⁴ Therefore it can be argued that this was the first significant occurrence in the radicalisation of mail art in Latin American and internationally. We might therefore consider that, until the mid-1970s, the mail art network in South America functioned in a distinct but ideologically similar way to other countries. Discontent with the *politics of art* and an indirect reference to lack of liberty did not yet demonstrate the politics of protest and denunciation.³⁵ For example, Padín's 1974 exhibition flyer critiques the art market rather than the politics of government:

'Often art comes from the cultural entropy created by official art and these excessive artistic forms sustain the system in order to reaffirm things already known...in art. Altering the function of the means of communication can change the information that is transmitted and may be taken advantage of...for the transmission of our own messages.'³⁶

After 1976, the *convocatórias* -invitations to take part in projects or exhibitions - became more explicitly socio-political in nature including alerts or calls to support campaigns for justice. By 1977, the nature of the dictatorship of Bordaberry in Uruguay was sufficiently clear for Padín to engage in explicitly anti-government rhetoric in the lead up to the 1977 Paris Youth Biennale. It is interesting to follow Padín's development during the years of the dictatorship. His 1984 mail art exhibition held at the daadgalerie, Berlin, *Latin America Hoy*, was much more directly critical of Latin American politics and the works included demonstrated a greater degree of socio-political comment.

Another example of the shift from the politics of art to the politics of government can be seen in the activities of Edgardo Antonio Vigo. The artist had been one of the principle proponents of conceptual art in Latin America in the 1960s.³⁷ He was engaged in social and participatory performances and printing practice; he referred to the 'creative constructor' rather than a 'spectator' in relation to his work.³⁸ However, by the 1970s, this preoccupation became more explicitly political, particularly after the disappearance of his son in 1976. After this, Vigo specifically developed his mail art contacts *in order* to denounce the dictatorships.³⁹ In 1977, Vigo campaigned against Padín and Caraballo's imprisonment, stating that 'From around the world arise voices condemning their imprisonment, demanding their physical and moral integrity

and the immediate liberation of both.⁴⁰ Vigo's actions constitute a shift from public and participatory art that constitutes a latent critique of established politics to direct campaigns that aim to destabilise and critique the military governments through mobilising individuals nationally and internationally.

The *III International Exhibition of Mail Art* took place in March 1978, in the Public Library Marechal Humberto Castelo Branco de Recife, which is the largest library in the state of Pernambuco. Fernando David and Fernanda Nogueira have interpreted the strategy of this exhibition in their article 'Negotiating Precariousness: Political-poetic power in the mail art network'.⁴¹ They argue that 'for the artist there was no doubt about the urgency that defined his intervention', which demand the freedom of Clemente Padín and Jorge Caraballo, who, as mentioned earlier, were imprisoned by the Uruguayan junta in 1977. Davis and Nogueira argue that the role of the exhibition in mail art's critical and political potential is made clear by Bruscky's show because it connected the disparate ideas and activities of many mail artists:

The show entered in to the wider campaign of denunciation and demand for the liberty of both artists...If the diffusion of the demand in the postal network attempted to spread it out in the *decentralised* circulation of the denunciation, acting as a starting point of successive and simultaneous critical interventions, the exhibition by Bruscky...plots out an opposite strategy.⁴²

The gathering together and consolidation of mail artists' demands for the liberty of Padín and Caraballo defines a special role for the exhibition in the network; namely, exhibitions can condense the disparate activities of artists, and thereby increase their impact. It also transforms what was potentially only an evasion of censorship, into an action that turns that evasion into a denunciation as well:

If the mail art network makes it possible to pierce the frontiers of the national states and to spread denunciations and actions of resistance, the risky exhibition challenges its local situation, making visible what before circulated only through the post, to transform this same strategy of avoiding censorship and, in this way, mobilise the same scene in respect to what was happening in the neighbouring country.⁴³

The evasion of censorship happens at the moment that the mail art work crosses a national border, from where the work can join a critical mass of works.

The joint display of these works also makes visible the means by which others can enter into this critical network.⁴⁴ Bruscky's exhibition sought to induct visitors into the network by introducing the sort of resources and methods that can be rapidly appropriated, such as postcards and envelopes, rubber stamps, photocopies and varied techniques of domestic printing. This is why Damaso Ogaz refers to mail art as 'a home-made bomb' and Davis and Nogueira see the exhibition as 'an invitation' to participate. Similarly, Cristina

Freire identifies 'exhibition value' as one of the primary means of identifying these art works within their intended context. The appearance of groups of works committed to the same artistic system reinforces the solitary, private action of the artist.⁴⁵ So, by 1977, the role of the mail art exhibition had become a momentary amalgamation of the network's protest.

To conclude, I will consider mail art's transnational character. We have seen that the partial shift from the intimate to the instrumental through the means of exhibitions was chronological as well as regional. The politicisation of artists in South America may also have had the effect of politicising the rest of this expansive but close-knit network. Ideas about art and politics travelled across and throughout it, no doubt having a profound affect on some of its participants. There can be no question that these international mail exhibitions established a dialogue across the globe. The list of participants in Padín's *Festival de la Postal Creativa*, reads like a who's who of the conceptual and alternative arts scene: Yoko Ono, John Lennon, Nam June Paik, Joseph Beuys, Dieter Roth, Richard Hamilton, Ken Friedman, George Brecht and Christo had their work displayed alongside other mail artists.⁴⁶ Padín's contacts with the international avant-garde were made through his activity in visual and experimental poetry and performance.⁴⁷ Indeed, Padín's text for the exhibition describes how 'all of today's artistic movements' can be tracked in the show, citing concretism, visual poetry, events and happenings, neo-dadaism and Fluxus, constructivism and conceptual art, postal art, body art and participatory works. *The Last International Exhibition of Mail Art* attracted 199 participants from 24 countries with fewer contributors from outside the established mail art correspondents.⁴⁸ Indeed this exhibition had a much stronger Latin American presence, although there were a huge number of participants from the United States – forty-three, almost a quarter of the total, whereas there were twenty-two from Argentina, where it was hosted. Participants included Luis Camnitzer, Liliana Porter, Guillermo Deisler (in exile in Bulgaria), On Kawara, Ray Johnson, Ken Friedman, Pierre Restany and Hervé Fischer. To a great extent personal contacts and correspondence are important in the demographics of participants.

These contacts, initially established as a means for artistic communication later became points in a web of collaboration which demonstrated against the the imprisonment of Padín and Caraballo. In 1978, the North American mail artist Geoffrey Cook began coordinating the US mail art action demanding their freedom, which eventually helped to achieve their early release. In a letter to Chuck Welch, he wrote: 'Because of pressure put on the Uruguayan government they were discovered alive! Due to further pressure we were able to mount, they were both paroled.'⁴⁹ Other artists worldwide became involved in the campaigns, such as the French artist and poet Julien Blaine, editor of the mailed publication *DOCK(S)*. The visibility of these campaigns throughout the world may have politicised other artists within the network. It is interesting to note that a number of mail art theoreticians point to Eastern Europe and Latin America as regions within which artists were acting with particular urgency. They do not, however, acknowledge the affect of this on the network of artists more generally. For example, John Held Jr writes: 'The political and economic turbulence which swirls around the alternative artists of Latin

America has had a profound effect on the way *they* approach art' (italics mine).⁵⁰ I would suggest that these artists had a profound effect not only on their own art, or Latin America's art, but on the practice of mail art worldwide.

Although regional context and specificity of location is important, the nature of the mail art network meant that ideas and concerns spread rapidly around the globe. The exhibitions and publications I discuss here may be understood as arising from specific places with that locale's particular concerns but it is necessary to remember that their lessons were quickly assimilated into the whole. For this reason, distinctions between regions, nations and hemispheres can only provide a partial understanding of these manifestations. Estera Milman proposed Fluxus as a 'conceptual country' and Stephen Perkins uses Benedict Anderson's notion of 'imagined communities' to express this transcendence of national boundaries, themselves part of the bureaucracy mail artists attacked.⁵¹ This interpretation presents a challenge to the notion of Latin American art as inherently ideological, and frees the interpretation of mail art from literal readings. The denomination of South American art in this context acts as a differentiating tool. By asserting mail art's transnationalism I wish to expose the limitations of the 'ideological' model for understanding what was a major expression of conceptualism in Latin America.

It is not up for debate whether mail artists in South America acted politically. However, the process of politicisation was a development that could be seen around the world, and not only in this geographical region. This is largely due to the fact that, as Padín points out, mail art had the 'speed and ability to communicate to any point'.⁵² The artistic diffusion enabled by mail art collaboration through exhibitions was also a diffusion of political information. The nature of mail art as an alternative system meant that artistic ideas circulated *around* the world, destabilising centre/periphery ideas and activity; although mail art was outside the art market it also fed into the mainstream art world through the medium of artistic exchange and exhibition. The development of mail art can challenge both hegemonic ideas about the centre's dominance in the spread of artistic ideas and challenge divisions made recently by Latin American scholars based on the political character of Latin American art and the 'nihilistic' attitudes of the 'centre'.⁵³ My argument is that many mail artists internationally displayed similar ideological concerns and it was not until the mid-1970s that the overt and distinct character of mail art in South America became manifest. This was precipitated by such occurrences as increased censorship and imprisonment of artists related to mail art. However, mail art became more manifestly political *internationally* with these occurrences and the growth of the movement. The shift from the intimate towards the instrumental, reflected by an increase in exhibitions, was an attempt to communicate with more mail artists and public audiences. The shift was effected with the expansion of the mail art network, when it became clear that its very internationalism could have the power to effect change. The initial impulses of mail art's rejection of the art market, pioneered by Ray Johnson, grew to take on a wider significance to do with artistic collaboration and solidarity in its international context.

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- ¹ Ilan Stavans, 'The Art of the Ephemeral', in *Latin American Posters: Public Aesthetics and Mass Politic*, ed. Davidson, R (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2006), 22-3.
- ² Bruscky, Paulo. 'Arte Correio e a Grande Rede: Hoje, a Arte é este Comunicado', (unpublished, 1976, reworked 1981), 1.
- ³ In Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina the mail art network was prefigured by the visual poetry movement *Poema-Processo*, a network of poets which provided the basis for contacts between artists in the region.
- ⁴ Crane, Michael, *Correspondence Art* (San Francisco: Contemporary Arts Press, 1984),3.
- ⁵ Ken Friedman, 'Mail Art History: The Fluxus Factor', *Franklin Furnace Flue* 4, No.3-4, Winter (1984), 20.
- ⁶ These transcripts of a series of radio interviews with New York mail artists are a useful point of analysis to determine viewpoints in the US (particularly New York) about the moral, social and political character of mail art. Six artists took part, so a degree of wider significance can be extrapolated from these interviews. The artists display a certain diversity of opinion but tend to emphasise the private character of their activities.
- ⁷ Welch, Chuck, *Networking currents: contemporary mail art subjects and issues*, (Boston: Sandbar Willow Press, 1986), 63.
- ⁸ *ibid*, 72.
- ⁹ *ibid*, 83.
- ¹⁰ *ibid*, 91.
- ¹¹ *ibid*, 76.
- ¹² Letter from Hans Ruedi Fricker to Chuck Welch, December 1, 1985, quoted in Welch, 39.
- ¹³ Pernecky, Geza, *The Magazine Network. The Trends of Alternative Art in the Light of Their Periodicals, 1968-1988*, (Cologne: Géza Pernecky, 1993).
- ¹⁴ David Cole, quoted in Welch, 91.
- ¹⁵ *ibid*, 9.
- ¹⁶ Friedman, 20.
- ¹⁷ Habermas, Jürgen, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, (1962, Trans. Thomas Burger MIT Press: Cambridge, Mass, 1989).
- ¹⁸ Saper, Craig J, *Networked art*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 15.
- ¹⁹ *ibid*, 23.
- ²⁰ In 1969, Liliana Porter and Luis Camnitzer exhibited mailed works and coordinated a mail art project as part of the 1969 *Experiencias* exhibition in Buenos Aires.
- ²¹ It was also a gentle poke at a problem in the mail art networks noted by Matt Ferranto and Ken Friedman. Ferranto notes that 'artists engaged in a competition of giving that introduced rivalry and antagonism into the mail art network' while Friedman adds that projects were marked by 'hundreds of projects and exhibitions termed 'first' and 'first international', as artists unaware of history and community tried to become the leading figure in the network'. See Matt Ferranto, 'Paradox and Promise: The Options of Mail Art', 5. http://www.spareroom.org/mailart/mis_4.html, (accessed 05/11/09).
- ²² Ulrich Obrist, Hans, *A Brief History of Curating*, (Paris: JRP Ringier & Les Presses du Réel, 2008), 154.
- ²³ Amaral, Aracy, *Mário Pedrosa: dos murais de Portinari aos espaços de Brasília*, (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981), 395.
- ²⁴ Author interview with the artist, January 2010.
- ²⁵ Edgardo Antonio Vigo, 'The State of Mail Art in Latin America' in Crane, 362.
- ²⁶ *ibid*, 362.
- ²⁷ *ibid*, 362.
- ²⁸ Ulrich Obrist, 156.
- ²⁹ Vigo, 358.
- ³⁰ Freire, Cristina, 'The Latent Discourse in Brazilian Art in the 1970s', (paper presented at *Vivid Radical Memory*, Works in Progress in Barcelona, May 2007), 1. http://www.vividradicalmemory.org/htm/workshop/bcn_Essays/artebrasil70_Freire_eng.pdf (accessed 20/09/09)
- ³¹ *ibid*, 3.
- ³² *ibid*, 3.
- ³³ Cited by Clemente Padín, 'Mail Art in Latin America: Part 2', (1997), <http://www.concentric.net/~Indb/Padín/lcpma2.htm>, (accessed 20/09/09)

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- ³⁴ Pianowski, Fabiane, 'Arte Postal Arte', *Merz Mail*, <http://www.merzmail.net/artepostalarte.htm> (accessed 20/09/09)
- ³⁵ Guy Bleus, quoted by Pianowski, 7.
- ³⁶ Padín, C, *Festival de la Poesia Creativa*, Exhibition Catalogue, 1974. Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 807/2/3/30.
- ³⁷ Pianowski, 7.
- ³⁸ Padín, *ibid.*
- ³⁹ Held Jr, John, 'Crossing the Cactus Curtain: Politics and Isolation Test the Commitment of Latin American Artists', *Mail Artist*, 2. <http://www.mailartist.com/johnheldjr/CrossingtheCactusCurtain.html> (accessed 20/09/09)
- ⁴⁰ Pianowski, 2.
- ⁴¹ Fernando David & Fernanda Nogueira, 'Gestionar de precaridad. Potencias poético-políticas de la red de arte correo', *Arte Contexto*, 24:4, (2009) <http://www.artcontexto.com.br/> (accessed 21/01/10)
- ⁴² *ibid.*, 1.
- ⁴³ *ibid.*, 1-2
- ⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 2
- ⁴⁵ Freire, Cristina, *Políticas do Processo: Arte Conceitual no Museu*, (São Paulo: MAC-USP, 1999).
- ⁴⁶ These are: Regina Silvera, Herve Fischer, Antonio Dias, Juan Carlos Romero, Per Kirkeby, Dick Higgins, Carlos Ginzburg, Anna Banana, Ray Johnson, Pedro Lyra, Eleanor Antin, Robert Filliou, Victor Grippo, Ben Vautier, Jochen Gerz, Edgardo Antonio Vigo, Robin Crozier, Endre Tot, Daniel Spoerri, Horacio Zabala, Terry Reid, Paulo Herkenhoff and Guy Schraenen.
- ⁴⁷ Held, 2.
- ⁴⁸ Vigo, 362.
- ⁴⁹ Letter from Geoffrey Cook to Chuck Welch, August 21, 1980 quoted in Welch, 36.
- ⁵⁰ Held, 3.
- ⁵¹ Perkins, 'Artists' Periodicals and Alternative Artists' Networks: 1963-1977', (PhD Diss., University of Iowa, 2003), 48.
- ⁵² Padín, 1974.
- ⁵³ See, for example, Camnitzer, L. *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007).

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ABSTRACT

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Postwar *Cabalgata*. The cultural magazine as a promotion and cultural link agent.

On June 1st, 1946 the magazine *Cabalgata* was launched in the streets of Buenos Aires with one ambition: “making in Argentina a great magazine for the whole continent”, a magazine “that would be the expression of all the activities of the American and universal culture.” In spite of these broad and diverse purposes, *Cabalgata* outlined an Americanist profile devoted to the spread of the arts.

It was all about a new entrepreneurship which rose from the press of the publishing house *Poseidón*, founded by the Catalan Joan Merli. Although this was a relatively small business among those from the same field, by the end of the 40s it extended its prestige – and its books- in the Latin American market. For this reason, the circulation of the book represented a central theme in the magazine, in the same way as the issues linked to the local and international editorial movement did.

Cabalgata strived to go beyond frontiers in two key senses: one connected with the readers’ universe and another one related with the idea of accomplishing a mission of transnational link. On one hand, it was launched to conquer a massive audience and for that it appealed to the visual impact of the illustrated magazines, which were full of graphic material. It also appealed to the resources of the daily press: a great layout, economical paper and low costs. With the profile of a cultural publication, interested in literary, theatrical, cinematographical and even scientific current issues, *Cabalgata* displayed a series of devices among which stood out the stress placed on the visual register articulated with specific texts. On the other hand, it intended to act as a Latin American diffusion agent through its circulation in different Spanish speaking countries. At the same time it kept posts of correspondent in Europe which supported the internationalist profile, with articles about current issues in the main artistic centers, especially France.

Cabalgata developed in the scenario of the immediate postwar, and it was in this context that it assumed a mission linked with a cultural reconstruction project, expressed through the

artistic-literary production and the massive diffusion. All through the 21 numbers it published up to 1948, the magazine kept up its intention to build bridges, reinforce those which already existed, create new ones and, above all, keep up a fluent contact with the artistic establishment.

The aim of this work is to analyze the strategies implemented by *Cabalgata* to create for itself an active place in the political-cultural weave of the postwar. It is intended to examine the textual and visual discourse used to design an action platform that was meant to be read in the Latin American context as a contribution to the recovery of the bonds of the intellectual transnational community. Finally, the main interest in the book -especially the book on art, bearer of images and texts- extends the analysis to the consideration of the issues developed like threads that weave a cultural plot, presented in terms of a “universal culture”, of which the book makes up, in this context, one of its key manifestations.

Postwar *Cabalgata*. The cultural magazine as a promotion and cultural link agent.

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On June 1st, 1946 the magazine *Cabalgata* was launched in the streets of Buenos Aires with one ambition: “making in Argentina a great magazine for the whole continent (...) which would be the expression of all the activities of the American and universal culture.”² With such broad and diverse purposes, *Cabalgata* outlined an Americanist profile devoted to the spread of the arts and literature. It was all about a new entrepreneurship by the publishing house *Poseidón*, founded by the Catalan Joan Merli. At the time, Merli was the artistic director of the magazine *Saber Vivir* and he counted with a broad experience in the fields of edition, the market and art criticism. Although this was a relatively small business among those from the same field, by the end of the 40s it extended its prestige – and its books- in the Latin American market. In this context, art books played a key role and they not only were they present along the magazine’s pages through reviews, essays and intense advertising, but they also formed part of a larger machinery aimed at mobilizing the editorial market and encouraging cultural consumption.

Cabalgata strived to go beyond frontiers in two key senses: one connected with the readers’ universe and another one related with the idea of accomplishing a mission of transnational link. On one hand, it was launched to conquer a massive audience and for that it appealed to the visual impact of the illustrated magazines, which were full of graphic material, as well as the resources of the daily press: a great layout, economical paper, low costs, and fortnight recurrence. With these strategies it strived to intervene in the cultural field with the aim of encouraging its consumption – translated in the acquisition of books –, at the same time as it contributed to the artistic knowledge.

On the other hand, it intended to act as a Latin American diffusion agent through its circulation in different Spanish speaking countries. At the same time it kept posts of correspondent in Europe which supported the internationalist profile, with articles about current issues in the main artistic centers, especially France.

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² *Cabalgata*, a. 1, n° 0 (June 1st, 1946): 2.

Cabalgata developed in the scenario of the immediate postwar, and it was in this context that it assumed a mission linked with a cultural reconstruction project, expressed through the artistic-literary production and the massive diffusion. All through the 22 numbers it published up to 1948, the magazine kept up its intention to build bridges, reinforce those which already existed, create new ones and, above all, keep up a fluent contact with the artistic establishment.

The aim of this work is to examine the devices applied to achieve these aims, and to analyze the profile of *Cabalgata* as a platform for the popularization of art. In this way it is intended to study the circulation of works of art, through the printed image and the texts, and their links with the promotion practices of the illustrated book.

The Edition of *Cabalgata* went through the networks of Spanish intellectuals exiled in Buenos Aires, since the years of the Civil War, which at the same time linked Argentinean writers and artists coming from other cultural forms of training, such the magazines *Sur*, *Anales o Realidad*.³ Promoted by the firm Merli and founded by the Spaniards Lorenzo Varela and Luis Seoane, it designed a profile which apart from covering the editorial interest, tackled the literary, artistic, theatrical, cinematographic and even scientific current issues, local and international, for which it got together a wide group of intellectuals from diverse ideological backgrounds.

Many of the usual contributors were part of the publications which Emilia de Zuleta placed within the “dominante española”, as was the case of *Correo Literario* (1943-1945) and *De mar a mar* (1942-1943).⁴ In many aspects, *Cabalgata* continued the project of the first of these publications, edited under the direction of Varela, Seoane and Arturo Cuadrado, although it got far from it when it eliminated the programmatic objectives of political cuts.⁵ The continuity bonds – apart from the layout, the cultural

³ Check John King, *Sur. Estudios de la revista argentina y su papel en el desarrollo de la cultura* (Buenos Aires, FCE, 1989), 202; Héctor R. Lafleur, Sergio D. Provenzano and Fernando P. Alonso, *Las revistas literarias argentinas 1893-1967* (Buenos Aires, The 8th. Loco, 2006 [1962]), 210. Regarding the exiled plastic artists and their insertion in the cultural environment of Buenos Aires, check Diana B. Wechsler, “Imágenes desde el exilio. Artistas españoles en la trama del movimiento intelectual argentino”, in AA.VV., *Arte y política en España 1898-1939* (Granada, Instituto Andaluz del Patrimonio Histórico, 2002), 134-151; regarding the work done by the intellectuals, check Dora Schwarzstein, *Entre Franco y Perón. Memoria e identidad del exilio republicano español en Argentina* (Barcelona, Crítica, 2001).

⁴ Emilia De Zuleta, *Españoles en la Argentina. El exilio literario de 1936* (Buenos Aires, Atril, 1999), 79.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 81 and ss.

subject matter and part of the group of editors – were defined by the fact that both paths developed in close connection with the book's market.⁶ It is possible that due to the disappearance of *Correo Literario* for reasons that went beyond its directors' will,⁷ the emergence of *Cabalgata* responded to the need to keep up working some sort of organ of the editorial movement, involved in the commercial circuit and absorbed in the issues of the sector

Even when the Spanish presence marked the direction of the magazine, the group of collaborators witnessed an inclusive criterion incorporating Argentineans who stood out in central areas, such as those devoted to literature, the editorial scene and the plastic arts. For example, Gonzalez Carbalho was in charge of the *Critica Literaria*, which Julio Cortazar also participated in, with reviews of books published by firms connected with the exiles, such as Losada, Atlantida, Emece, Kier and Poseidon itself, among others. At the same time, the Spaniards Rafael Alberti, Arturo Serrano Plaja, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Francisco Ayala and Américo Castro also wrote there. The presence of Guillermo de Torre stood out. He was an exiled writer, well known due to his distinguished career in the country, and whose work flowed between *Cabalgata* and *Sur y Realidad*, among other publications. As regards, the visual arts, Varela (under the pseudonym Felipe Arcos Ruiz), Serrano Plaja and Ramón Gomez de la Serna, contributed with essays on Latin American and European art, together with the Argentinean critics Jorge Romero Brest, Romualdo Brughetti, Cayetano Córdova Iturburu – who also wrote about Argentinean literature – and Julio E. Payró, among others. A significant part of the topics and artists dealt with by these writers was linked with the appearance of certain art books. Let's have a look at the art paths which organized this section in dialogue with the editorial production.

II.

“Pablo Ruiz Picasso. With any raincoat, some trousers with kneepads (...), a scarf against the piercing grey Parisian cold, and on his face the noble and painful tracks

⁶ These features, and the universe of readers that they meant to appeal to, defined a project different from that of the previously quoted *Saber Vivir*, set out with a more elegant and expensive layout, check María Amalia García, “El señor de las imágenes. Joan Merli y las publicaciones de artes plásticas en la Argentina en los '40”, in Patricia Artundo (ed.), *Arte en Revista. Publicaciones culturales en la Argentina 1900-1950* (Rosario, Beatriz Viterbo, 2008), 167-199.

⁷ Cf. Silvia Dolinko, “El rescate de una cultura “universal”. Discursos programáticos y selecciones plásticas en *Correo Literario*”, *Ibid.*, 131-165.

of grandeur.”⁸ All the solemnity to portray the “immeasurable genius” of modern art eliminated, these words, which described Picasso’s picture on the cover N°0 of *Cabalgata*, prepared the terrain for the article displayed on a double page inside the magazine: a dissertation which concentrated all the significance of the images around the name of Picasso, this time with no raincoat or trousers.

Everything and nothing, anything, is Picasso, when he is not exactly, in all his great extent perhaps unreachable, Picasso. (...) Few men, at least among the ones one knows, would resist the test of a photograph in underwear, in knickers. And even less an even more terrible test: that of posing kissing a dove, or with a dove on the head.⁹

These lines inserted the reader into a view close to what Rosalind Krauss described as “aesthetic of one’s own name” and which has conducted work on the picassian production where the stylistic, social and historical considerations are moved aside due to the predominance of the biographical data.¹⁰ However, even when the purposes of the text seem to be limited to just pondering his impetuous personality and his courage at getting himself photographed in some “unmentionable knickers”, the evocative power of the name Picasso two years after the liberation of Paris, seems unavoidable. For those who considered the artistic practice a declaration in favor of freedom - which had also accounted for the controversial fact that he had joined the French Communist party in 1944 -, his permanence in the French capital during the German occupation had turned into a symbol of resistance.¹¹ So in the times of the immediate post-war, his presence in the opening number of *Cabalgata* marked a gesture of alignment in favor of peace and liberty, although this did not mean interference in the debates on art and politics which his declarations, campaigns and works brought up.

With Picasso they presented a few vectors, which although they did not expose a defined aesthetic position on the part of the editorial, show some interest to get involved in the promotion of international modern art as from its central figures. We will see that this determination was also current for the Argentinean productions, though not without exception. On the other hand, at the same time as it developed

⁸ *Cabalgata*, a. 1, n° 0..., *op. cit.*: 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*: 12.

¹⁰ Rosalind E. Krauss, “En el nombre de Picasso”, in *La Originalidad de la vanguardia y otros mitos modernos* (Madrid, Alianza, 1996, (1980)), 39-57.

¹¹ Francis Frascina, “La política de representación”, in Paul Wood, Frascina, Jonathan Harris and Charles Harrison, *La modernidad a debate. El arte desde los cuarenta* (Madrid, Akal, 1999), 144.

this contemporary profile, *Cabalgata* set up eclectic bonds with the cultural tradition through a perspective which was broad enough so as to deal with a wide variety of issues: from the friezes at the Parthenon to Joaquín Torres García's constructive universalism, going through Rembrandt, Francisco de Goya, Pierre Renoir or Vincent Van Gogh.

The visual arts took up a significant space, which varied between 4 and 8 pages out of the 24 which normally made up the magazine, even when they must dispute this prominence with other artistic disciplines. In this context, the image kept up its sustained presence and this emphasis on the visual was marked by resources, such as the reproductions of works of art, photographs and drawings. Within the art section the protagonists of each number were given priority with photographs and reproductions on the cover and long illustrated articles in charge of specialists, which as a general rule were displayed in the central pages. With a relatively uniform design, they tried to look for a visual impact while they kept a relation text/image where the attention was focused on the latter. From n°7 up to n°13, the magazine changed its format due to the scarcity of paper, it reduced its size and as a consequence changed the general layout.¹² Yet, they continued having one or two central protagonists per number. Under this modality, well-known artists, significant for a modernist account, circulated in the magazine. Among others were the already mentioned Picasso, Vasily Kandinsky, Salvador Dalí, Giorgio De Chirico, Henry Matisse, the French painter and illustrator Pierre Bonnard and the Japanese Foujita, connected with the school of Paris; the Spanish painters José Gutiérrez Solana, Juan Gris and the sculptor Jorge de Oteiza; the Brazilian Cândido Portinari, the Uruguayans Joaquín Torres García and Augusto Torres, the Mexican painter Manuel Rodríguez Lozano and other Latin American artists. Among the Argentineans the following stood out: Lino E. Spilimbergo, Antonio Berni, Miguel C. Victorica, Attilio Rossi, the sculptor José Alonso, Raquel Forner, Juan Batlle Planas, Jorge Larco, Norah Borges and Lucio Fontana, among others. Apart from these articles which stood out due to their design and amount of pages, other texts were included, such

¹² Colour was also included on the cover and the usual reproductions of works of art were replaced with movie stars or theatre artists. Even when these changes were justified by the scarcity of paper, the Editorial did not seem to take notice of the situation of evident tension which was affecting the editorial field during the Peronist government. Check Pablo Sirvén, *Perón y los medios de comunicación 1943-1945* (Buenos Aires, CEAL, 1984).

as brief articles, reviews on expositions, spreading of news and chronics. Painters such as Horacio Butler, Juan Del Prete, Orlando Pierri, Horacio March, Marcos Tiglio, Enrique Policastro, and even the concrete artists, circulated through the reviews and comments.

The aesthetic selections carried out throughout the magazine presented a heterogeneous overview, going through the polyphonic register of a wide variety of poetics from different roots. The result was an approach to the contemporary art marked by the multiplicity of voices which made up the staff of editors together with the foreign subsidiaries. This diversity had already been manifested in the initial purposes of *Cabalgata*, when they wanted to give way to the game of disagreement / discrepancy, to contrasting ideas, which written in essays, could eventually generate and mobilize the intellectual debate. However, it is possible to read some ideological matrixes which underlie in this multiplicity, and which are linked to the update of the contemporary painting and to the possibility of producing an “American art”.

To begin with, the position of art at the time of the immediate post-war was an issue which was tackled in different texts, which made reference to the need of an update assigned to painting taking into account those times. However, this that we could label as an imperative of contemporaneity did not have the same sign for all the contributors interested in the issue. For instance, S. Horovitz’s work, “With the artist, the man”, stressed the commitment of the intellectual and urged not to forget reality, a reality that could also be that of the nuclear war. Regarding creativity, it attacked the “cosmopolitanism” and the “intellectualist fantasy” which distanced the artist from his social environment.

This refers to the position of pure art, clearly false, compared to the already known victory of artistic Humanism, that assumes in the artist -whether plastic, intellectual or whatever kind he is- the indissoluble duality of “MAN-ARTIST”, who suffers with the man, who succeeds or is defeated with him, and who fights for him. With understanding and solidarity as an aim, and his pen and paintbrush as weapons.¹³

The rivals were those who “have knitted the canvas of the surrealisms, supsurrealism (everything but realism), cubism, dadaisms, dalisms, existencialism.” Undoubtedly,

¹³ *Cabalgata*, a. 3, n° 18 (April of 1948): 6.

these words would find many more detractors than supporters among the contributors to *Cabalgata*.

The essay by the Spanish painter and critic Eduardo Westerdahl, "Revision of the painting by Chirico", also attacked the issue of the contemporaneity, but in this case the focus of criticism was on the specificity of the painting. The problem was no longer linked to the literal sense of a work of art or to the apparent disdain for the reasons which provided a dramatic and unavoidable reality, but to the evolution of the plastic language. In this sense, what infuriated the writing were the "returns", the "neos" which accused the latest production of this Italian.

Chirico has never been a painter of our times, our contemporary, a man who would express by himself the spirit of our times. (...) He is the constant delaying neoclassic who all cultures must put up with. He is the "camouflaged" man, the one who carries the bomb to the best constructions of the spirit of the man of any time. His attitude, like Salvador Dalí's, which in all fairness must be revised as that of the surrealist movement, only gives away that which the constructive vigil of the man of our times exists of misery, of ambition, of reaction, of impotence and of Museum.¹⁴

While other painters such as Juan Gris for instance, were catapulted to the seat of honor of "pictorial myths" in permanent update, De Chirico¹⁵, known years before as a remarkable representative of the modern painting, was here expelled to the "scaffold of the arts". Possibly, these words also found detractors in *Cabalgata*.¹⁶

An outlook closer to that of Westerdahl can be found in the article by Julio Rinaldini, dedicated to the Argentinean painter Quirós. The latter had to face a dilemma from the moment he made up his mind to "catch up with his moment". For Rinaldini "it was not possible that a nature which was as vital as his could not get to admit/figure out that the times we are going through are not the same, that different is our sense of reality, different is the rhythm of our minds, different are the mechanism of our associations and the way in which our intelligences perceive". However, the artist gave no sign of having found the right way. In spite of the success he was achieving in Buenos Aires, breaking record of spectators and sales, the proofs of his failure were evident: from the "irreflexive" application of color to the understanding of the

¹⁴ Eduardo Westerdahl, "Revisión de la pintura de Chirico", *Cabalgata*, a. 3, nº 15 (January of 1948): 8.

¹⁵ Ramón Gómez de la Serna, "Resurrección de Juan Gris", *Cabalgata*, a. 3, nº 17 (march of 1948): 8-9.

¹⁶ In fact, in the same issue they published the article "Los enigmas de Salvador Dalí" by Ramón Gómez de la Serna, *ibid.*, pg. 1 and 3. On another level, the Italian artist's positions had been questioned from the section *Correspondencia*, where the affaire about the apparent forgery of a lot of pictures was described. *Cabalgata*, a. 1, nº 1 (October 1st, 1946): 2.

painting as a representation of imitation of nature, Quirós's production remained anchored in the past.¹⁷

With derivations completely different in comparison with these last cases, the concern for the art autonomy became one of the central themes of the articles on abstract art published by *Cabalgata*. Brughetti and the poet Juan Jacobo Bajarlia were the ones in charge of tracing a genealogy of the first groups of concrete artists, of explaining their poetic platforms and analyzing their works.¹⁸ With these jobs the magazine assigned a significant space to the burning debates which mobilized the artistic scene in the times of *La Bataille Réalisme-Abstraction*, which the art discourse and the international politics would go through until the beginning of the 50s.¹⁹ Yet, it is hard to think of an effective wish to involve in the contemporary debates. In any case, what we can affirm is that in the midst of this receptivity to "all the voices", *Cabalgata* manifested a vision that was alert to the transformations of the current artistic field, also, in the sections devoted to the cinema, dancing and music.²⁰

On the other hand, Latin American art went through discussions connected with the unification of the continent, the lack of circulation of each country's aesthetic culture, and the stamp of the precolombine cultures on contemporary art and the possibility of a modern and current artistic production, enriched with the European repertoire, but fed in the typical traditions and linked to the particular reality of each region. These ideas made up the desired "Americanist" profile which *Cabalgata* advocated since its beginnings through articles about art in Mexico, Uruguay, Brazil, Chile, and especially, Ecuador, apart from the reviews which were regularly incorporated to the agenda of exhibitions.²¹

¹⁷ Julio Rinaldini, "El dilema de Bernaldo de Quirós", *Cabalgata*, nº 5 (December 10th, 1946): 10.

¹⁸ Romualdo Brughetti, "Un mundo más puro y sencillo: el arte abstracto en la Argentina", *Cabalgata*, a. 1, nº 4 (November 19th, 1946): 6; Juan Jacobo Bajarlia, "El arte abstracto", *Cabalgata*, a. 3, nº 16..., *op. cit.*: 5 and, by the same author "Mimo Mena y el arte abstracto", *Cabalgata*, a. 3, nº 20 (June of 1948): 11. An análisis of the reception of concrete art in María Amalia García, *abstracción entre Argentina y Brasil. Inscripción regional e interconexiones del arte concreto (1944-1960)* (Doctoral Thesis, Universidad de Buenos Aires, mimeo), chapter 2; Cristina Rossi, "En clave de polémica. Discusiones por la abstracción en los tiempos del peronismo", *Separata*, a. VI, n. 11, Rosario (November of 2006): 35-54.

¹⁹ Francis Francina, "La política de representación"..., *op. cit.*, 132 and ss.

²⁰ Regarding music for example, Juan Carlos Paz, musician and composer closely linked with concrete groups, wrote about the "Música estadounidense de vanguardia", *Cabalgata*, a. 3, nº 16..., *op. cit.*: 1 and 10.

²¹ Felipe Arcos Ruiz, "Una exposición argentino, uruguayo y chileno en París", *Cabalgata*, nº 1..., *op. cit.*: 14-15; Romualdo Brughetti, "Nuevos pintores", *Cabalgata*, nº 6 (24 de diciembre de 1946): 10; R. Molins i Fábrega, "Exposiciones de arte en México", *Cabalgata*, a. 3, nº 15 (enero de 1948): 2.

In Buenos Aires, an exhibition of the Ecuadorean artists Alfredo Palacio, Oswaldo Guayasamin and Oscar Valencia, at the Peuser gallery, motivated Romero Brest's pen to return to the idea of Latin American integration and the need to know the "brother countries".

If some time we, the Americans, are to feel the joy of being consequent with ourselves, it will happen when we give up betraying ourselves, and mutually integrate to build the continent's reality. America's personality, and therefore the accomplishment of its spiritual destination, will not only be strengthened due to each country's deep development and to the collection of isolated efforts, but also to the development of the culture in extension and integration.²²

However, only Guayasamin managed to get out of a folk tendency and move forward along an expressionist line, able to go deep into the indigenous issue of his land and show an "immediate reality sublimated in terms of universality".²³

Within the same line of problems, Brughetti placed the figure of Gertrudis Chale. With a grandiloquent title, "America and Art", the critic tried to summarize the painter's career between Europe and America through an interview which revolved around the potential of Latin American art.²⁴ Born in Vienna and emigrated to Argentina due to Nazism, from there Chale laid the bridges to build what Brughetti called "American dialogue". It was her trips around Latin America, the promotion of a network of contacts among artists and intellectuals, and the possibility of getting to know and become deeply involved with the culture of each of the regions which she visited, what made her – according to the critic – the ideal figure to establish that dialogue.

Besides, Chale's aesthetic proposal which encouraged to look for the roots of creative inspiration in American land with the aim of producing a modern and universal painting, appealed to the brilliant examples of Picasso and Matisse as explorers of other cultural traditions. This conjunction between tradition and modernism, in particular the old precolombine tradition, had a paradigmatic example in the figure of Torres Garcia, as it was stated in Payró's article²⁵. In this way, the Americanists aspirations of *Cabalgata* were projected in the spread of a selection of

²² Jorge Romero Brest, "Tres pintores ecuatorianos", *Cabalgata*, a. 1, n° 1..., *op. cit.*: 11.

²³ *Idem.*

²⁴ Romualdo Brughetti, "América y el arte: diálogo con la pintora Gertrudis Chale", *Cabalgata*, n° 9 (February 11th, 1947): 10-11.

²⁵ Julio E. Payró, "Un pintor de América: Joaquín Torres García", *Cabalgata*, a. 2, n° 14 (December of 1947): 16.

contemporary artists. In the same sense, these aspirations marked an area of interest within the policies of editorial promotion.

III.

With the outbreak of the Civil War, the publication of books in Spain underwent a drastic cut which interrupted the supply of the Latin American market. Argentina, which had been developing in this field for some years past ²⁶, was favored by the inflow of specialists who contributed to the transformation of the country into one of the main suppliers of books of the region; ²⁷ and the Spanish would play a predominant role in the reactivation of this movement with the foundation of new companies and the intervention of others already established. In this context, the artistic issues received an unknown treatment and Merli, together with Gonzalo Losada, was one of the protagonists who gave a boost to the production of illustrated books.

In *Cabalgata*, the central interest in the circulation of the book was reflected in the section called “Mundo Editorial / Libros”, which included articles connected with the Argentinean movement and references to matters which affected the international market, especially within the Latin American sphere. On one hand, there were reviews of editorial news, advances and bibliographic reviews. On the other hand, there were articles and interviews to the protagonists of this sector, such as the publishers/editors Losada, D’Urbano Viau, Merli, the Mexican Daniel Cossío Villegas and others.

Besides, the omnipresence of advertisements of publishing houses, printers’, graphic studios and stationeries gave the most remarkable visual touch regarding these interests. At the same time it evidenced the supportive treatment between books and visual arts. In this way, for example, the announcements by the Fondo de Cultura Económico, whose slogan quoted the “editorial effort of American transcendence”

²⁶ Check Leandro De Sagastizábal, *La edición de libros en la Argentina. Una empresa de cultura* (Buenos Aires, Eudeba, 1995), 62-74; *Todo es Historia*, n. 172, Buenos Aires, September of 1981, pp. 8-46; Emilia De Zuleta, *Espanoles en la Argentina...*, *op. cit.*, 57 and ss.

²⁷ Cf. José Luis de Diego (dir.), *Editores y políticas editoriales en Argentina, 1880-2000* (Buenos Aires, FCE, 2006), 91-123.

which the enterprise intended to make, were related with the reviews of the art section through the advertised books, such as *Artes plásticas ecuatorianas*, by J. Navarro, or *¿Existe América Latina?* by L. A. Sánchez, among others. At the same time, Losada published ads linked with critical essays, like was the case of the book by J. M. Podestá, *J. Torres García*; and of course, *Poseidón* as well. When Brughetti dealt with the exhibition by Del Prete in Peuser, he appealed to Merli's text, recently published by his company, incorporating textual quotations to his reviews of the works. At the same time, within the literary section, the review of this book in charge of Cuadrado aroused great interest in the advertisements.

These are some of the great number of examples which made up the strategies of the magazine to spread the product of the publishing companies. But those were not the only promotion policies; they also linked the encouragement to consume books with that to consume artistic images. On the cover of the n°1 they announced the publication of a supplementary plate per copy, printed in six colors and in a great layout, with the reproduction of a picture by a famous artist, antique or modern. It was all about big names of the universal history of art, such as Goya, Cézanne, Velázquez, Monet, El Greco, Matisse and others. With this measure, *Cabalgata* continued with an old tradition not only with the local publications of cultural profile, but also with some art magazines; although it went a step ahead. Like in other cases, readers were encouraged to frame the plates and form a personal art gallery, but in this case the color, the quality of the paper and the size of the images were additional incentives to give these reproductions a treatment similar to that given to the original pictures. Besides, the magazine offered an extra service through the stationery Postal Mercurius which, apart from making the deliveries of the advertised books, it offered the plates already framed. These reproductions with their wooden frames carefully elaborated were likely to be collected, set up in the living room or entrance hall of private homes. With them, an artistic consumption was encouraged which led to a historiographic tradition settled in a group of canonical figures of occidental art; in some cases pieces of a museum which paradoxically and at the mercy of advertising could not be missing in the modern bourgeois home.

This articulated circulation of books and paintings, aimed at outlining multiple aspects of a miscellaneous idea of the modern occidental culture. *Cabalgata* started off from

dominant interest in the books and its inherence with the editorial market, to be placed as a promoting agent of knowledge, images and aesthetic ideas. Through these channels it designed a space of dialogue which was open to different voices and led by the implicit intention of recovering or consolidating bonds with the international intellectual community during the immediate postwar period. It was also determined to define positions regarding the European cultural tradition with the sight laid on the possibilities of a production rooted in the local context. In this sense, the ideas of artistic update and those linked with the Latin American imagery were articulated. The results were to be taken as far away as the distribution, the customs rights and the idiomatic limits made it possible.

CURRÍCULUM VITAE

SÍNTESIS DE ANTECEDENTES ACADÉMICOS Y DE INVESTIGACIÓN

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DOCTORA EN HISTORIA Y TEORÍA DEL ARTE POR LA UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE BUENOS AIRES (2008), LICENCIADA GRADUADA EN LA MISMA CASA DE ESTUDIOS (2000) Y MAESTRA NACIONAL DE ARTES PLÁSTICAS EGRESADA DEL CENTRO POLIVALENTE DE ARTE DE TRELEW, CHUBUT, ARGENTINA.

HA SIDO DOCENTE DE LA ASIGNATURA *ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEO* EN LA MAESTRÍA EN RESTAURACIÓN-CONSERVACIÓN DEL TALLER DE RESTAURO DE ARTE (TAREA) (2007), Y EN *HISTORIA DEL ARTE ARGENTINO Y LATINOAMERICANO II (SIGLO XX)* DE LA MAESTRÍA EN HISTORIA DEL ARTE DEL INSTITUTO DE ALTOS ESTUDIOS, AMBAS EN LA UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE GENERAL SAN MARTÍN (2009), BUENOS AIRES.

ACTUALMENTE SE DESEMPEÑA COMO PROFESOR COORDINADOR DEL ÁREA COLECCIONES Y COLECCIONISMOS EN LA MAESTRÍA EN CURADURÍA EN ARTES VISUALES DE LA UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE TRES DE FEBRERO, BUENOS AIRES. ASIMISMO, ES DOCENTE DE LAS ASIGNATURAS *COLECCIONES Y COLECCIONISMOS I Y II* DE LA MISMA CASA DE ESTUDIOS.

RECIBIÓ BECA DE FORMACIÓN DE POSTGRADO (2002/2006) Y BECA POSDOCTORAL (2008-2010), OTORGADAS POR EL CONSEJO NACIONAL DE INVESTIGACIONES CIENTÍFICAS Y TÉCNICAS Y ACTUALMENTE SE DESEMPEÑA COMO INVESTIGADOR ASISTENTE EN LA MISMA INSTITUCIÓN.

DESARROLLA INVESTIGACIONES RELATIVAS AL CONSUMO CULTURAL, COLECCIONISMO Y MERCADO DE ARTE EN LA ARGENTINA Y LATINOAMÉRICA DEL SIGLO XX. DESDE 1998 HA PARTICIPADO EN PROYECTOS DE INVESTIGACIÓN SUBSIDIADOS POR LA UBA, LA FUNDACIÓN ANTORCHAS E INSTITUCIONES EXTRANJERAS. ES INVESTIGADORA DEL INSTITUTO DE TEORÍA E HISTORIA DEL ARTE JULIO E. PAYRÓ (FACULTAD DE FILOSOFÍA LETRAS, UBA) Y MIEMBRO DE LA COMISIÓN DIRECTIVA DEL CENTRO ARGENTINO DE INVESTIGADORES DEL ARTE (CAIA). HA PUBLICADO DIVERSOS TRABAJOS SOBRE COLECCIONISMO ARTÍSTICO Y ARTE ARGENTINO CONTEMPORÁNEO, PRESENTADOS EN CONGRESOS DE LA ESPECIALIDAD LOCALES E INTERNACIONALES.

Abigail McEwen
The Institute of Fine Arts – New York University

“Arts magazines and the cosmopolitan vision of Cuban modernism, 1952-1961”

The culmination of modernism in Cuba spanned the decade of the 1950s, conceptually bridging and defining cultural politics from the dictatorial coup of 1952 to the socialist revolution in 1959. During this period, in which Cuba at times envisioned itself as the future “New York of the Caribbean,” modernist values of abstract form and expressive freedom gained currency in Havana, advanced by a young *vanguardia* in search of a contemporary, cosmopolitan face to Cuban culture. Collectively, these artists represented the third and final generation of Cuba’s historical avant-garde: emphatically rejecting the *tropicalismo* that had characterized the art of the preceding decades, these artists embraced the ethics of high modernism – signally, of pure abstraction – as a liberation from the past and as an expression of Cuba’s contemporaneity. “We decided we had to be up-to-date, to discover a new vision of our country,” the artist Raúl Martínez explained years later of the youngest *vanguardia*’s mentality at that time. “We were tired of the palms and the fruits, of the idyllic vision. We decided we had to take a different direction. We had to look at this country, not at Europe. We decided to use North American abstraction as our form, because in Cuba there was no tradition, there was nothing to explore.”¹ Indeed, as the paradigm shifted from the School of Paris to the New York School, Cuban art would attain an unprecedented (though short-lived)

¹ Raúl Martínez, quoted in Shifra M. Goldman, “Painters into Poster Makers: A Conversation with Two Cuban Artists,” ch. 5 in *Dimensions of the Americas: Art and Social Change in Latin America and the United States* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 146-47.

synchronism with the rest of the world -- an achievement not lost on the artists themselves.

Both a visual form and an ideological platform, modernism signaled a new horizon of possibility for art as a means of social and political transformation. As a public forum uniquely positioned to disseminate modernist aesthetics and to articulate a cosmopolitan vision for contemporary Cuban culture, the arts magazines that emerged during this time took on three critical roles. First, as a primary source of visual information otherwise hard to come by, the magazines provided artists with an important knowledge of the international art world, from the recognized centers of New York and Paris to the emerging Latin American cities of Buenos Aires and São Paulo. Second, the magazines publicized and encouraged the artists whose radical experiments with form met resistance from the traditionally conservative Havana art community. Their steadfast advocacy for Cuban artists in general, both abroad and locally in Havana, served both to introduce modern Cuban art to an international audience and in some way, too, to legitimize it to a skeptical public at home. And third, during the season of revolution the magazines bore silent witness to the nationalization of the arts under the Castro regime and to their early instrumentalization as a tool of the socialist state.

Using three magazines -- *Noticias de Arte* (1952-53), the *Revista del Instituto Nacional de Cultura* (1955-56), and *Artes Plásticas* (1960-61) -- as paradigmatic case studies, I hope to suggest the critical role that these magazines played in advancing modernist values in Cuba in the years immediately preceding and following the Revolution of 1959.

The trajectory of these magazines reflects the conceptual sources of Cuban modernism, the international aspirations of Havana's avant-garde, and above all the intense politicization of modernist aesthetics. Arts magazines played a critical role in the evolution of modern Cuban art both as conveyors of information from the international art world and, no less, as a forum for debate over the identity of modern Cuban art. These magazines, ephemeral yet instrumental in shaping contemporary discourse, reflected the great ambition of the modernist idea in Havana, its utopian and cosmopolitan prospects, and its ideological consequence.

The history of avant-garde magazines in Cuba precedes the emergence of the arts magazines in the 1950s, and the currency and authority that these latter magazines commanded owes much to their predecessors. The seminal *Revista de Avance*, for example, was the first magazine to attach a political ethos to the cultural sphere in the late 1920s, as Cuba's intellectual and political vanguards came together in protest of the tyranny of then-president Gerardo Machado. The *Revista* shocked the Havana community out of its cultural provincialism by publishing foreign writers, something that the literary magazine *Orígenes* would do on a more comprehensive scale a decade later. Under the direction of the writer José Lezama Lima, the *Orígenes* group embraced the metaphysics and mysticism of high-modernist European art and literature. Distinctly apolitical and at times criticized for its alleged Eurocentric bias and cultural elitism, *Orígenes* nevertheless left an important legacy for the specialized arts magazines of the 1950s. In its commitment to high artistic principles and its insistence that Cuba could produce art equal to that which they admired abroad, the *Orígenes* group articulated a

new vision of Cuban modernism that absorbed the formal influences of international modernism and, moreover, that posited Cuban artists on a par with their European peers.

Although the cultural and literary magazines of the earlier twentieth century often reported on the visual arts, only in the 1950s did more specialized arts magazines appear in Havana. The first and groundbreaking publication was *Noticias de Arte*, founded by three artists – Mario Carreño, Luis Martínez Pedro and Sandú Darié – with the mission, in their words, “to be a true source of pride for those who care about improving our cultural environment, for those that fight against mental laziness, apathy and indifference toward art.” They open their editorial statement by explaining that they do not wish to be “just another magazine”; rather, they intend to expand Cuba’s cultural purview through objective reporting on “every manifestation of national and international culture that reflects the concern that animates the ongoing creative activity of artists of today and of all time.”²

² Darié, Carreño, and Martínez Pedro, “Presentación,” *Noticias de Arte* 1, no. 1 (September 1952): 3. The entire editorial statement is as follows: “*En nuestro propósito que Noticias de Arte no sea ‘una revista más’, sino el eco de una imperiosa necesidad de nuestro medio artístico, el cual reclamaba una publicación que pudiera presentar de manera condensada y seleccionada las distintas y variadas actividades intelectuales que forman la sensibilidad y el devenir del pensamiento contemporáneo. Noticias de Arte no se propone ‘llenar un vacío’ como dicen pomposamente algunas publicaciones noveles, sino contribuir modestamente, de acuerdo con sus posibilidades, a ensanchar nuestro ambiente cultural, divulgando sin prejuicios que pudiesen empañar la libre expresión del pensamiento, toda manifestación cultural nacional y extranjera que refleje la inquietud que anima la constante actividad creadora del artista de hoy y de siempre.*”

“*Queremos que el público pueda estar plenamente informado de cuanto ocurre de interés en la actualidad artística internacional y local, y que los artistas encuentren en Noticias de Arte un medio de difundir y defender sus ideas y sus anhelos sin discriminaciones de tendencias o credos. La crítica que dediquemos a los distintos eventos artístico será muy reducida, muy concisa, debido a la falta de espacio en nuestras páginas, pero trataremos de que ésta sea siempre constructiva y orientadora. Observaremos que toda información reproducida contenga absoluta seriedad y veracidad.*”

“*Como Noticias de Arte no es una empresa de lucro, tratándose, como el lector obviamente puede comprobar, de un gesto completamente desinteresado, el apoyo que logre del público será destinado exclusivamente al mantenimiento y mejoramiento de la publicación, al aumento de sus páginas y de su material gráfico y literario. Abrigamos grandes esperanzas de que en un futuro no muy lejano Noticias de*

The magazine, the first of its kind in Cuba, took up its self-appointed mission with serious resolve; and its pages reflect on the one hand its didactic character, with articles that attempt to broadly define modernism and its historical and critical situation – e.g., Nicolás Quintana’s “In Defense of Cuban Architecture” and Mario Carreño’s “The Moral Factor in Abstract Painting” – and on the other hand its international scope, with reports on art news from around the world, from the Venice Biennale to the inauguration of a Rufino Tamayo mural in Mexico City. This dual charge – to raise Cuba’s cultural awareness and to provide up-to-date news – was well-served by a combination of shorter news items and longer features, which covered not only the visual arts but dance, music, literature and film as well.

What would most distinguish *Noticias de Arte* from later arts magazine were its cosmopolitan horizons, which aimed to put modern Cuban art squarely on the international map. Not only did the magazine regularly print articles from an international community of art historians and critics – from Alfred H. Barr to Le Corbusier to Jorge Romero Brest – the editors sent copies to museums all across the Americas and Europe, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Not surprisingly, the editors favored New York and the United States in general with steady coverage of news, from the Modern’s twenty-fourth birthday to a feature on Adja Yunkers, whose Abstract Expressionist style had enormous influence on Cuba’s up-and-

Arte sea un verdadero orgullo de aquellos que se preocupan por el mejoramiento de nuestro ambiente cultural, de los que luchan contra la pereza mental, la apatía y la indiferencia hacia el Arte. “Hacemos llegar al público nuestro mejor saludo en la seguridad de que acogerá con entusiasmo esta publicación que por su carácter, es la primera que se edita en Cuba. También queremos expresar nuestro profundo agradecimiento a todos los colaboradores por la valiosa, eficiente y desinteresada labor que prestan a Noticias de Arte.”

coming generation of artists. While the magazine's North American interests mirrored the social and economic politics of the day, a time when eighty flights a week connected Havana and Miami, the magazine also sought out less recognized connections within the Latin American world. A collaborative relationship with Gyula Kosice, a leader of the non-figurative Madí movement in Argentina, was established early on through the personal involvement of Sandu Darié, one of the magazine's founding editors, with the Madí group. In a show of avant-gardist fellowship, Kosice wrote to Darié in support of the magazine, calling *Noticias de Arte* a "transcendent magazine from every point of view, above all for the training and guidance of young people hungry to see their time and their art publicized, especially within Latin America, in which magazines are counted on to play an essential role in this regard." In closing, he affirmed his interest and asked "to be added to the list of collaborators," offering to send "material for the magazine – essays, paintings, poems, sculptures and also works from [his] Madí colleagues, who delighted over the first issue."³

The magazine's earnest ambitions and determined cosmopolitanism set an auspicious tone for Cuba's cultural scene at the beginning of the decade. Privately funded and published by artists, it had an editorial autonomy – and certainly also, a utopianism – that later magazines would not. Its eleventh and final issue was dedicated to the second São Paulo Biennial, in which twelve Cubans participated. But even as Cuban artists were

³ Gyula Kosice to Darié, in *Noticias de Arte* 1, no. 4 (December 1952): 16. The letter reads, in full (emphasis in original): "Noticias de Arte que nos envía adjunta, nos parece una revista de todo punto de vista *trascendente*, sobre todo para la formación y orientación de la gente joven ávida de ver potenciada su época y su arte sobre todo en latinoamérica, en que son contadas las revistas que funcionan esencialmente en ese sentido.

"Si a Ud. a parece y siendo uno de los editores, me gustaría pertenecer a la lista de *colaboradores*: enviaré entonces, en la medida que lo requieran, material para la revista – ensayos, pinturas, poemas, esculturas y también irán trabajos de mis compañeros madís que recibieron jubilosamente el No. 1."

gaining international exposure, they faced challenges at home; and cultural politics under the dictator Fulgencio Batista, who took over in 1952, did not favor the youngest *vanguardia*'s cause. In the back pages of this last issue, the magazine reported on the protest of the second Hispano-American Biennial, exported to Cuba by Francoist Spain and emblematic of the increasingly strained and divided state of the artworld at that time.

Noticias de Arte ceased publication with this issue from fall of 1953. One of its editors, the artist Mario Carreño, resurfaced two years later as the artistic director of a new magazine, the *Revista del Instituto Nacional de Cultura*, which sought to emulate, in a way, the coverage of art news introduced by *Noticias de Arte*. As the official organ of the National Institute of Culture, founded in 1954 under Batista, the magazine took a more nationalist interest than had *Noticias de Arte*, and its tone was more presentational and academic than its predecessor as well.

The Institute was itself poorly received. Headed by the man-about-town Guillermo de Zéndegui, it was felt to be elitist and superficial, a reflection of Batista's own uncouthness with respect to the arts. Symptomatic of its poor leadership is the following anecdote, which circulated *sotto voce* among Havana's upper crust; as paraphrased by Roberto Segre, Mario Coyula, and Joseph L. Scarpaci, "the imaginary setting goes like this:"

A nervous Batista seeks advice from his brand-new director of the National Institute of Culture about an upcoming special exhibit of the Mona Lisa. Looking for an easy way out, the ill-trained Zéndegui tells the president to pause in front of the painting, take two steps back from the work, and exclaim admiringly: 'Such a face! What an expression!' [¡Qué cara! ¡Qué gesto!]. The next day when the exhibit opens, Batista follows Zéndegui's advice but confuses the word 'face'

(cara) with ‘hell’ (carajo) and exclaims: ‘What the hell is this?’ [¿Qué carajo es esto?]⁴

Whatever its directional shortcomings, the journal bravely sought, in its own words, “to contribute to the rediscovery of Cuba . . . , a young nation, liberal and open, which holds in constant tension the fine-tuned strings of the mind in order to record all the vibrations of the world’s cultures.” “For the first time in our history as a republic,” the ministry continued, “the country’s government has agreed to recognize the issue of culture within the scope of national concerns, no more and no less urgent than the vital problems of the economy. . . . This magazine, in short, is the result of a purpose: the most prominent part of an emerging but serious cultural policy, which encompasses . . . the need to provide the world with a taste of what we have and a better showcase of our skills and capabilities.”⁵

The magazine, whose identity was closely allied with its governing body, did positively promote contemporary Cuban art, publishing installation photos from the national galleries with lofty captions and manifest pride. Although the emphasis fell on modern-day Cuba, with reports on urban development and architecture as well as on the visual arts, it also reported on Cubans abroad – for instance, Wifredo Lam in Venezuela, Raul Milián’s prize at the 1955 São Paulo Biennale, and the Cuban delegation sent to the Carnegie International. Coverage of international artists was inconsistent and somewhat

⁴ Roberto Segre, Mario Coyula and Joseph L. Scarpaci, *Havana: Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis*, rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 115.

⁵ Guillermo de Zéndegui, “Presentación,” *Revista del Instituto Nacional de Cultura* 1, no. 1 (December 1955): n.p. “En alguna medida esta REVISTA habrá de contribuir al redescubrimiento de Cuba, tan explorada y tan expoliada y, sin embargo, tan poco conocida. . . . Por primera vez en nuestra historia republicana, el gobierno del país conviene en reconocer a los asuntos de la cultura rango de cuestiones nacionales, ni más ni menos apremiantes que puedan serlo los problemas vitales de la economía. . . . Esta REVISTA, en fin, es el resultado de un propósito; parte principalísima de una incipiente pero seria política cultural, en la que se contemplan, entre otras urgencias nacionales, la necesidad de ofrecer al mundo una muestra de lo que hacemos y una mejor referencia de nuestras aptitudes y posibilidades.”

eccentric; articles addressed, for example, contemporary German expressionism and two thousand years of painting in China.

The fate of the magazine was naturally coupled with that of the National Institute of Culture, which suffered waning interest and currency in the last, tumultuous years of the Batista dictatorship. The last issue of the magazine appeared in 1956, Carreño left Cuba in 1957, and the Institute was itself dissolved in 1959. Its replacement, named under a new government led by the young Fidel Castro, was the General Directorate for Culture; and the magazine *Artes Plásticas* was launched, under its auspices, in 1960. Signed by the new head of the Ministry of Education, Vincentina Antuña, the magazine's editorial statement pledged to "maintain a space dedicated to news that we hope will be rich and varied in the days ahead." She continued, "We want to make the cultural activities of our country well-known; we aim to gather news of what happens in America, because from her, more than from any other country, we have become isolated. And, finally, we will maintain our relationships with larger cultural networks."⁶

The pages of the magazine bear witness to the indeterminacy of the new regime's cultural policy and its bearing on the modernist ethos that had so dominated the visual arts during the 1950s. Articles with titles like "Cuban Painting 1959," "Painting and Revolution," and "Cuba in its Painting" all grappled with questions surrounding the authorship and identity of Cuban painting, understood to be fully implicated within the revolutionary

⁶ Vincentina Antuña, *Artes Plásticas* 1 (1960): n.p. "...mantendremos, en esta Revista de Arte que ahora se inicia, un espacio importante dedicado a una información que esperamos hacer, en las entregas venideras, rica y variada. Queremos dar a conocer la actividad artística de nuestro país; aspiramos a recoger noticias de lo que en nuestra América ocurre, porque de ella, más que en ningún otro lugar hemos permanecido aislados. Y, finalmente, no descuidaremos nuestra relación con los grandes centros difusores de cultura."

process. The third issue of the magazine published the full text of Castro's cautionary "Words to the Intellectuals," whose often-quoted line – "Within the Revolution, everything; outside it, nothing" – still notionally governs Cuba's cultural policy today. Castro ultimately decided against taking a hard line with respect to the arts – perhaps taking a lesson from Soviet Russia – and while those most invested in the modernist cause did mostly leave Cuba by the early 1960s, it can't be said that modern art altogether disappeared. It's not for nothing that the insert on which Castro's "Words to the Intellectuals" was printed is set between photographs of abstract sculpture, notably a powerful example by Agustín Cárdenas, who worked for almost forty years in exile. Modernism may have lost its political currency in post-Revolutionary Cuba, but *Artes Plásticas* still carried pieces of news from abroad – a review of the 1960 Quadriennale in Rome, for instance, or an admiring account of a meeting with Jean Arp in Paris, written by the Cuban artist and poet Fayad Jamís.

Later issues favored subjects more immediately topical to the Revolutionary moment, often with underlying socialist sympathy. Social realism never gained real traction in Cuba but it did have more than a passing moment of interest. Drawings by Adigio Benítez and Servando Cabrera Moreno – the latter in fact a converted abstractionist – figure prominently in the third and fourth issues, which also feature children's artwork celebrating the landing of the *Granma* and a report on the brigades sent out to rural Cuba to teach the history of art. Modernization, the face of which became the national campaign for literacy and copious spending on public works, became in short time detached from the earlier, utopian and universalist idea of modernism in Cuba, which had

aspired to cosmopolitan exchange and modeled itself after the historic Euro-American avant-gardes. Modernism was on the one hand a casualty of global politics, as Cuba shifted from the North American to the Soviet sphere of influence; but on the other hand, it stands to reckon that Modernism itself, in its classic teleological sense, had played itself out – belatedly in Cuba, to be sure, but certainly by the 1960s almost everywhere else as well.

The Cuban case is singular, even within the Latin American context, for the very longevity of its Revolution, which remained a constant and ever-present ideological conflict throughout the 1960s. The very fact of its progress made it insufficient simply to accept its overall principles in a general or informal way; rather, it required what the poet Roque Dalton once described as “the permanent incorporation of its totalizing practice.”⁷ In other words, if the Revolution’s totalitarian vision broked no middle ground, the rupture of 1959 set off a particular crisis of the modernist project: what could be salvaged of the liberal and universalist ethos of the modernist avant-gardes in art produced under the auspices of a Communist state, as Castro officially declared Cuba to be in May 1961? The preceding decade had suggested the beginnings of a new, golden age for Cuban culture for the youngest generation of artists and intellectuals; and yet their disillusionment – and in many cases, swift departure into exile – signaled the end of the modernist project in Cuba, bound as it had been to the Republican cause. The critical fortunes of modernism, from the near-euphoria for anything American in the early 1950s to caricatured critiques of her neo-colonial pretensions of the following decade, played out to great effect in the pages of Cuba’s arts magazines from this time. The magazines

⁷ Roque Dalton, *El Intelectual y la Sociedad* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1969), 92.

resolutely documented the utopian and transcontinental vision of Cuba's modern artists and its gradual disintegration, under first nationalist and later socialist pressures. While *Noticias de Arte* served primarily as a conduit of information, running in both directions between Cuba and Euro-American and Latin American worlds, the *Revista del Instituto Nacional de Cultura* and *Artes Plásticas* ultimately served as referendum on modernist values during the season of revolution. The political contingencies of modernism would eventually contribute to its undoing, but the arts magazines remain nevertheless a testament to the situational power of art and, even, of its possibilities as an agent of social transformation.

Transnational Latin American Art: International Research Forum for Graduate Students
and Emerging Scholars

Abstract: Mediating the Government and the Art World: *Plástica* Magazine and their
Didactic Project

Doris Bravo

Plástica, published between 1956 and 1960, was the first magazine dedicated to the plastic arts in Colombia. In its brief history, Judith Márquez and her editorial staff undertook an ambitious two-part didactic project—to educate the public about modern art and clarify the Colombian government’s responsibility to the arts. This paper outlines the philosophy behind and execution of *Plástica*’s didactic project, demonstrating how it enabled the magazine to propose government collaboration.

Plástica disseminated information on modern art through diverse content, influential contributors, and exploring issues significant to modern art. Through this didactic project, *Plástica* raised the profile of artists and made modern art accessible to the public. This project also enabled *Plástica* to assert their intellectual autonomy, giving them the leverage to confront the government and propose a partnership in the promotion of Colombian art. *Plástica* established Colombian art in the same sphere as modern art movements in other Latin American countries and abroad; artists were often featured in country-specific profiles. By making this nationalistic categorization the point of comparison, *Plástica* further strengthened their case against the Colombian state by challenging the government’s international reputation.

Though *Plástica* seems like a straightforward encyclopedic source on modern Colombian art, they have positioned themselves as mediators between the public and international forces of artistic legitimacy; and between the art world and the Colombian

government. *Plástica's* legacy for other post-war Latin American art magazines is as a model of how to initiate readers to unknown art movements and how to uphold artists' interests in the face of adversity.

Doris Bravo

Transnational Latin American Art:
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Mediating the Government and the Art World:

Plástica Magazine and their Didactic Project

I.

Judith Márquez' dream to create the first magazine dedicated exclusively to the plastic arts seemed nonsensical considering the apathy directed towards contemporary art in 1950s Colombia. To combat such indifference Márquez set forth on an ambitious mission: "Modestly –but dignifiedly- "PLASTICA" proposes to popularize our art within Colombia and popularize it abroad."¹ As the first publication of its kind in Colombia, *Plástica* was determined to act as ambassadors of the art world thus cementing their legacy as defenders of artists' interests.

Beginning with their first issue in 1956, *Plástica's* mission was executed through a didactic project that would clarify contemporary art for the general public. Simultaneously, the magazine demonstrated that contemporary artists in Colombia had the potential to become significant on an international level but were impeded by the Colombian government. Thus the mission, in essence *Plástica's* educative program, was two-part: it informed the readers on what constituted contemporary art and addressed the issues facing Colombian artists. This instructive endeavor reflected the magazine's expertise of the art world; therefore, as an entity intellectually autonomous of the government, *Plástica* was in a position to confront these officials.

My hypothesis is that since this was a publication that presented itself as thoroughly professional, *Plástica* was able to propose a serious and unprecedented discussion with the Colombian Ministry of Education. Recognizing that the government was the fundamental source of artistic support, the magazine leveraged their artistic authority into an invitation to collaborate with the Minister of Education. This

collaboration would fulfill both of *Plástica's* needs: to preserve their intellectual autonomy and ensure support for the art they were promoting.²

II.

In order to understand why the first Colombian magazine on the plastic arts needed to have a pedagogic mission it is critical to understand how contemporary art³ was viewed during this period. In the 1950s artists in Colombia were not well regarded by the general public. The artistic profession did not seem admirable or productive:

The artist's deplorable situation does not move anybody and the immediate suggestion is: That [he] work! As it is understood, we will not fall into the lyricism of believing that to paint or to sculpt are honorable jobs. What is, in comparison, is copying files on a machine in an office or attending to the public behind a bank window, or applying asphalt in the streets; any activity distinct from art gives us a clear, explicit product, helping to construct the society in which we live.⁴

Another problematic factor between the public and the art world was the nature of contemporary art. Marta Traba highlights the average person's difficulty in understanding abstract art: "in Latin America, this process has not been verified without resistance [...]" Regarding Colombia, abstract painting is an island that people look at with indifference preferring to always recognize visible things."⁵ Therefore it was imperative for *Plástica*, as the first magazine of its kind in Colombia, to be an instructive publication, one that addressed the complex positions of contemporary art in Colombian society.

III.

The next point to consider in order to comprehend *Plástica's* didactic project is how the magazine responded to these views on contemporary art. First of all, despite a negative public perception, *Plástica* was determined to showcase contemporary art. The magazine's aesthetic program, in essence the type of art they promoted, was tied to art

practices of the moment. In their mission statement, *Plástica* wished to promote “our art” in this magazine. This is a highly ambiguous term since “our art” can represent many things. In the geographic sense, “our art” could mean Colombian art exclusively. However, this is not completely true. Art from countries in Latin America, North America, and Europe were regularly featured. “Our art” refers to a time more than a place, basically the art preferred by the magazine staff: contemporary art.⁶ Though numerous nations were covered, contemporary Colombian art dominated the pages. The presence of international art was both as a point of comparison and a legitimizing source, topics that will be explored in more detail later in this paper. The preference for abstract art, both Colombian and non-Colombian, is evident in the number of special issues and articles dedicated to this movement.⁷ However, *Plástica* featured all movements within the contemporary art of this period, always drawing parallels with Colombian art. The magazine incorporated art history as long as it benefited their case for contemporary art. For example, in the essay *3000 Years of Colombian Art* Traba establishes the importance of contemporary art by incorporating it into the history of Colombian art.⁸

In order to resolve the prejudices faced by contemporary art, it was essential for *Plástica* to make this art, and by extension the magazine, accessible to the general public. Their mission to “popularize our art” was a mission towards accessibility that would at once raise the artist’s profile while demystifying contemporary art. *Plástica* achieved accessibility through a variety of didactic methods. First of all, the staff did not define their target audience; in one instance they refer vaguely to “those who study fine arts.”⁹ Rather through their content it is apparent that they wished to reach a wide spectrum of the general public. Because the magazine intended to appeal to such a multitude of

readers, the variety of content in each issue ensured there would be something for everybody: art reproductions for those who wanted to quickly scan the magazine; short articles for readers who wanted summaries; and in-depth theory for readers who sought those ideas. The magazine was available in bookstores and cultural centers in Bogotá in addition to national and international subscribers.

Two features that particularly raised the artist's profile were the use of biographies and the practice of artists as contributors. These biographies accompanied essays on the artist and emphasized their educational development, travel abroad, and achievements. For example, an essay on Alejandro Obregón highlights his education in Colombia, Boston, and Barcelona; his trips between Europe, Colombia, and the United States; and his ascension to the directorship of the School of Fine Arts of Bogotá.¹⁰ Artists were therefore presented as professionals who excelled within their field. Many artists, like Carlos Mérida, Cecilia Porras, and Fernando de Szyszlo, were also contributors to *Plástica*, writing essays about the state of abstract art, autocriticism, and contemporary painting in Latin America.

In addition to artists, the magazine benefited from a variety of contributors: art critics like Traba and Walter Engel; Octavio Paz, a writer and poet; and government officials like José Gómez Sicre, Chief in the Visual Arts Unit for the Organization of American States and Josef Szigeti, the Minister of Culture for Hungary. These contributors offered diverse opinions and perspectives showing the reader that many people are involved in developing the artistic discourse and that, inevitably, a reader from any walk of life could recognize a contributor.

Another element important to the magazine's instructional plan was the inclusion of bibliographies in several issues. These lists served as self-educational recommendations for the general public: Leonello Venturi, *Cómo se mira un cuadro* [How to Look at a Painting]; René Huyghe, *Dialogue avec le visible* [Dialogue With the Visible One]; Thomas Munro, *Signs in Aesthetics*; Herbert Kühn, *El arte rupestre en España* [Cave Paintings in Spain]; Bernard Berenson, *Piero de la Francesca, The Arch of Constantine*; Engel, *Pintores colombianos contemporáneos* [Contemporary Colombian Painters]. Therefore *Plástica* initiated the general public into the art discourse, with these suggestions acting as significant supplements for further reading.

A final element to the success of *Plástica*'s elucidation of contemporary art was the feature on abstract art that spanned issues 6 and 7. By presenting abstract art in essays based on country rather than resemblance, Márquez stressed each country's individual interpretation of abstract art. Yet the special section on abstract art differed in both issues. For example, in issue 6 France, Italy, Spain, and the United States were the focus since these were "the four countries with the most artistic activity in the world."¹¹ Issue 7 featured some Latin American countries (Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Cuba, and Venezuela), England, and Germany. The purpose of these two issues was to first establish the history of abstract art and demonstrate which countries were leading this movement, as exemplified in issue 6. Most importantly, by including Colombia among these countries Márquez highlights that Colombian artists are part of an internationally recognized and practiced movement. This format of dividing artists by nation also reflects a deliberate move by *Plástica* whereby they established points of comparison

between countries, which aided in their confrontation of the Colombian government. This point will be examined later in this paper.

This two-issue special also provided definitions regarding styles within abstract art. For example, “geometric naturalism” consisted of

- a. Recognizable natural or geometric forms that reveal their own geometric structures and mutual relations
 - b. The space is treated in three dimensions and often with atmospheric suggestions
- Origins: Cubism, Expressionism, Constructivism¹²

Other styles that were defined include: “architectural and mechanical geometry,” “pure geometry,” “biomorphic expressionism,” and “geometric expressionism.” Though representative of complex ideas, these definitions gave the average reader the foundation for a vocabulary on abstract art, empowering them to delve deeper into the field.

IV.

Besides educating the general public about contemporary art, the didactic project also exposed the hardships facing Colombian artists. Though events that took place in Colombia appeared in the magazine,¹³ the presence of the international art world was stronger. Outside of Colombia, the mission to disseminate Colombian art was executed through material that celebrated Colombian artists’ participation in international biennials and other exhibitions. *Plástica* also published articles from foreign publications that discussed the participation of Colombian artists at such events. For example, when Márquez and two other female artists participated in a show in Washington, D.C. the magazine published three articles regarding their exhibition. One article, *Colombian Painters in Washington*, was reprinted from the American publication *The Washington Post*. Essays from foreign publications were republished if they featured Colombian art

like “L’art Contemporain en Colombie” [Contemporary Art in Colombia], written by Traba for the French publication, *Prisme des Arts*. This essay included several Colombian artists and reproductions of their work. A foreword written by *Plástica* establishes the importance of this foreign publication:

Prisme des Arts is the art magazine with the highest circulation in the world; their traditional critical rigor only allows the insertion of select collaborations, which refer to select artists, also [...] from America only monographs from the United States, Mexico and the Caribbean Archipelago have been published.¹⁴

This foreword indicates the historic significance of this article as well as exposes the caliber of artists in Colombia. In her essay for *Prisme des Arts* Traba notes the struggles of these artists: “the most anguishing problem that confronts our painters and sculptors is the safeguarding of an art with American origins, that precisely has access to a technique of universal values.”¹⁵ This “safeguarding” refers to the precarious position of artists in Colombia who were for the most part abandoned by their government. In light of the foreword, the “anguishing problem” Traba highlights is even more distressing—Colombian artists are talented but lack official support.

V.

Though *Plástica* was dedicated to disseminating art, an undeniable undercurrent within the magazine was their frustration with the Colombian government, as exemplified in their republishing of the aforementioned essay. Considering the political atmosphere during this period, such a confrontation was not surprising.¹⁶ The National Division of Cultural Extension, “responsible for obtaining and executing policies regarding the development of art and culture,” relied on the Ministry of Education in order to bring cultural and artistic policies to fruition; thus, any instability within the Ministry adversely

affected support for artists.¹⁷ During the publication of *Plástica*, 1956 to 1960, there were eight Ministers of Education. In 1960 alone, there were three changes.¹⁸ The arts in particular suffered much under Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, president of Colombia during the magazine's early years, since

During the dictatorship the program of National Salons was suspended; but this measure was not taken with repressive ends, but because of a lack of organization that generated instability within the Ministry of Education.¹⁹

Thus, the government's indifference towards the arts is revealed. Though Rojas Pinilla's tenure ended in 1957, the neglect of the arts continued especially given the inconstancy within the Ministry of Education. In their first issue Márquez stated that she intended *Plástica* to educate the Colombian government so that they could better offer support:

We are going to tell [the Minister of Education] in successive entries in PLASTICA, what the problems are, confiding in his patriotism and his fine sensibility for high cultural matters.²⁰

In another issue artists' needs are summarized succinctly: "protection for our art."²¹ More specifically *Plástica* believed that in addition to government funding "a systematic and organized plan for artistic development" was also necessary.²² Though the staff never outlined such a plan within the magazine, there were many suggestions specific to certain events. In issue 9, Engel outlines a scheme for Colombia's participation in the First Interamerican Biennial Exposition for Painting and Engraving in Mexico. Engel explains the requirements for every nation: "each invited country can send 40 paintings and 40 engravings, or they can select 20 painters and 20 engravers, with two works for each."²³ He also stresses the importance of each country's Minister of Education, "or the entity to whom this faculty is directed," who is responsible for organizing "a local Executive Committee integrated by the people designated by" the Minister or a similar entity.²⁴

Engel recommends who should make up this committee in Colombia closing his article with the suggestion that “it would be urgent that the material being sent to the Biennial in [...] Mexico City be organized as soon as possible.”²⁵ This is a notable essay since it reflects the magazine’s two-part instructive program by simultaneously speaking to the general public and the government; the former becomes aware of what the Ministry should be doing to support Colombian art while the latter now has a strategy of how to execute that support.

Without the options of private collectors and institutions, *Plástica* must contract assistance from the government in order to accomplish the mission set forth in their first issue. Moreover, the task of internationalizing art during this period was typically the responsibility of governments, further underscoring *Plástica*’s need for a confrontation. Yet these are the magazine’s motivations behind their conflict with the Minister of Education. Since outlines alone will not motivate the government to take action, it is imperative to show the Ministry of Education why it is in their interest to better support national artists. Over the course of *Plástica*’s history there were three biennials in Sao Paulo. The Fourth Biennial of 1957 was the most heavily covered by the magazine, though Colombia did not officially participate:

If three artists (Obregón, Ramírez Villamizar and Silva Santamaría) will have paintings there, that does not signify an official representation of Colombia, but of the Panamerican Union who will have their own pavilion. Wouldn’t it be possible for the Minister of Education to immediately initiate tending measures to assure Colombian participation in this competition? For the diffusion in all the world (magazines, newspapers, and critics from all continents considerably comment on the details of the Biennial) of our art, the investment of a few pesos that the cargo to Sao Paulo requires represents more, much, much more than the ten thousand pesos that will be given to a painter at the end of the year.²⁶

This message is presented before a list of biennial participants, separated by country. The format of this list emphasizes the need for official support of artists in the international sphere since this is obviously the practice among nations. In this light, *Plástica's* comments magnify the plight of Colombian artists; but most importantly the omission of Colombia from this list, and especially the magazine's spotlighting of this fact, strikes at the government's international reputation. It is in the interest of the Colombian government to support their artists abroad because it is good PR in the diplomatic sphere. In a parallel way to supporting athletes for the Olympics, the Ministry of Education should support Colombian artists if only to flex their nationalistic muscle on an international stage.

VI.

Plástica have clearly voiced their concerns and the government now comprehends what is at stake by withholding artistic support. Yet why should the Ministry take the advice and censure of an art magazine?

The Colombian government should heed the suggestions of *Plástica's* staff because this magazine is connected to the international art world.²⁷ *Plástica* underscores their legitimacy within the artistic field by consistently showcasing the international art world, the primary vehicle of legitimacy in this area. Art critics like Herbert Read, art magazines like *Prisme des Arts*, and biennials like the Venice Biennale were regularly featured. These players are vehicles of legitimacy because they have

The monopoly of the power of consecration of producers and products [...] to say with authority who is authorized to call himself a writer (etc.) or even to say who is a writer and who has the authority to say who is a writer.²⁸

These players exercise this “power of consecration” through their essays, reviews, exhibitions, etc. Since *Plástica* publishes these texts they recognize the foreign players’ power of legitimacy, further highlighting the magazine’s position as well-informed figures in the art world. Most importantly, their awareness of the legitimate art world counters any notion that this is a marginal magazine. Due to the critical nature of their didactic project, *Plástica* could be seen as just another group of antagonistic radicals, carelessly placing blame on the government. By showing their active involvement and knowledge of the international art scene they establish themselves as a valid art magazine, capable of confronting the government on matters concerning artists.

Yet beyond their familiarity with the international art world, *Plástica’s* artistic legitimacy also stems from the product they create: their magazine. Therefore, it is worth exploring the implications of establishing such a landmark publication. By having the distinction of being the first of its kind, *Plástica* instituted a model for other magazines in Colombia; one that incorporated the elite of the national and international art worlds yet was still accessible to a universal readership. Most importantly, the magazine demonstrated that art professionals could establish and run an art publication on their own, thereby affirming their intellectual autonomy. Márquez, Traba, and Engel decided what to include and exclude in each issue, independent of the Ministry of Education’s agenda. Through their expertise and intellectual autonomy, *Plástica* was able to be in a position to collaborate with the government, in a way that individual artists before 1956 could not have done.

Plástica does not propose the government take control of the entire artistic scene in Colombia. First of all, this is not necessary since Colombian art has begun the

internationalization process without the government's exclusive support. This is evident in the international exhibitions with Colombian participation. Since *Plástica* published the coverage of these exhibitions, the magazine had a critical role in reporting the internationalization process within Colombia as well as internationalizing Colombian art to their foreign audience. The government could simply make things easier by handling official duties, like organizing the local committee for the Mexican Biennial.

Secondly, it would be unwise for *Plástica* to recommend that the Ministry take full command since that would threaten the magazine's intellectual position. If they asked for too much help from the government, *Plástica* reveals the true potency of the government's hegemony. Thus the Ministry could be in a position to decide which art movement to sponsor in Colombia, which artists to send to biennials, etc.; this would threaten *Plástica's* intellectual autonomy as a magazine that creatively functions independent of the government and is fully connected to the national and international art worlds. Yet the magazine must ask for assistance since, as a magazine, *Plástica* has minimal impact in the real world. Though *Plástica* actively engages the art world in its pages they cannot transfer this influence into the real world, since as an intellectual entity they exist on a separate plane. The magazine therefore has no power to penetrate the political and economic spheres, which are reserved only for institutions, like the state. Therefore *Plástica* must confront institutions that can affect real change, like the Ministry of Education. And ironically *Plástica* can only confront these institutions through their magazine, their source of power and legitimacy.

Plástica thus presents the situation of Colombian art as one that relies on multiple entities, working collaboratively. Through their educational mission the magazine

positions itself as an indispensable partner; one that is rooted within the field of contemporary art, has identified the issues facing artists, and has proposed viable solutions. Though the magazine may not have as much clout as the Colombian government, they have enough authority to team up with the official powers that be. *Plástica's* mastery and influence are the missing elements that will remedy the Ministry's inexperience and disorganization.

VII.

Plástica's complex mediating role defines their legacy in post-war Colombia. As mediators between the general public and the art world they demonstrated that, with the right approach, contemporary art could be taught to the masses. Yet the same educational mission that made contemporary art accessible also exposed the hidden truths about the sustainability of contemporary art in the post-war world. *Plástica* identified that the mid-twentieth century art world had evolved significantly; they responded to this change by realizing that in order for contemporary art to survive in Colombia and in this new world, the government needed to be involved. Despite its brief seventeen-issue history, *Plástica* established a model for other post-war Latin American art publications. Such magazines needed to inform, and often initiate, a wide readership into unknown art movements. But most importantly, art magazines would need to uphold the interests of artists for the sake of their nation's artistic integrity.

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IX. End Notes

¹ Judith Márquez, “Propósitos,” *Plástica* 1.1 (1956): 3. Modestamente –pero dignamente- “PLASTICA” tiene el propósito de vulgarizar nuestro arte dentro de Colombia y vulgarizarlo en el extranjero.

² It is important to clarify a few points before beginning my paper. Many issues of *Plástica* have inconsistent numbering; for example, in some issues the cover is counted as the first page while in other issues it is not. Also in many issues only some pages are numbered while other issues have no numbered pages. For the sake of consistency I will apply *Plástica*'s most frequent numbering scheme, where the cover is counted as page one. I do not count special section inserts in these page numbers, but refer to the pages that sandwich them. Many articles are authorless and *Plástica dieciocho* has assigned “Redacción Plástica” as the author to these articles; I will do the same.

³ I use the term contemporary art, rather than modern art, since *Plástica* emphasized art of the moment, which seems to suggest contemporary art. Also, the term modern art, since it began in the preceding century, reaches too far into the past for the purposes of this paper.

⁴ Marta Traba, “Responsabilidades de uno y otro lado,” *Plástica* 1.2 (1956): 4. La situación deplorable de un artista no conmueve a nadie y la sugestión inmediata es ¡Que trabaje!, puesto que, se sobreentiende, no vamos a caer en el lirismo de creer que pintar o esculpir son trabajos honorables. Sí lo es, en cambio, copiar fichas a máquina en una oficina o atender al público tras la ventanilla de un banco o poner asfalto en las calles; cualquier actividad distinta del arte nos da un rendimiento claro, explícito, ayuda a construir la sociedad en la cual vivimos.

⁵ Marta Traba, “Algunos problemas acerca del arte abstracto en América Latina,” *Plástica* 1.7 (1956): 8. En Latinoamérica, ese proceso no se ha verificado sin resistencias. [...] En cuanto a Colombia, la pintura abstracta es una isla que la gente mira con indiferencia prefiriendo siempre reconocer las cosas visibles.

⁶ The core staff consisted of Judith Márquez, Marta Traba, and Walter Engel. As well as being the editor-in-chief, Márquez was also a noted artist; her paintings were regularly featured in the magazine reflecting her involvement in the contemporary art scene of Colombia. Traba was an art critic and art historian who came to define this generation of art history in Colombia. Engel was also an influential art critic of contemporary art during this period.

⁷ Some articles include: *Problemática del arte contemporáneo* [The Problematic of Contemporary Art] by Wilhem Worringer; *Algunos problemas acerca el arte abstracto en América Latina* [Some Problems Regarding Abstract Art in Latin America] by Marta Traba; *Últimas tendencias en la pintura abstracta* [The Latest Tendencies in Abstract Painting] by Herbert Read.

⁸ Marta Traba, “3000 años de arte colombiano,” *Plástica* 1.16 (1960): 7. Si el arte es –como invariablemente se asegura- el producto que más expresivamente define el desarrollo de cualquier grupo humano, les será posible a los estudiosos y a los simples espectadores estadounidenses seguir la evolución de la cultura colombiana a través de 3.000 años.

⁹ Redacción Plástica, “El arte informal,” *Plástica* 1.15 (1959): 3.

¹⁰ Aristides Meneghetti, “Alejandro Obregón ¿fraude o realidad?” *Plástica* 1.3 (1956): 8-9.

¹¹ Redacción Plástica, “Nota, Arte Abstracto en Francia-Italia-España y Estados Unidos,” *Plástica* 1.6 (1957): 5. Los cuatro países de mayor actividad artística en el mundo.

¹² Redacción Plástica, “Estados Unidos,” *Plástica* 1.6 (1957): 6. a. Formas naturales o geométricas reconocibles relevando la estructura geométrica de las mismas y de sus mutuas relaciones; b. El espacio es tratado en forma tri-dimensional y a menudo con sugerencias atmosféricas; Orígenes: Cubismo, Expresionismo, Constructivismo.

¹³ Within Colombia, *Plástica*'s mission to promote “our art” was executed through the support of Colombia-specific events. For example, salons from all over the country were reviewed. Though the majority events were from the capital, Bogotá, other cities were also included: Medellín, Baranquilla, and Cúcuta. Every year a *Balance* was made summarizing that year's artistic activities in Colombia. A *Balance* consisted of a brief summary of highlights for that year, Collective Exhibitions, Individual Exhibitions, Well-known Names, New Names, and Criticism.

¹⁴ Redacción Plástica, “Introducción a Gran revista francesa divulga el arte colombiano,” *Plástica* 1.14 (1959): 9. *Prisme des Arts* es la revista artística de mayor circulación en el mundo; su rigor crítico tradicional sólo permite la inserción de colaboraciones muy selectas, que se refieren a artistas muy selectos, también [...] De América sólo había publicado antes las monografías de los Estados Unidos, México y el Archipiélago Caribe.

¹⁵ Marta Traba, “Gran revista francesa divulga el arte colombiano,” *Plástica* 1.14 (1959): 10. El problema más angustioso que afrontan nuestros pintores y escultores es el de salvaguardar un arte de origen Americano, que tenga acceso precisamente a una técnica de valores universales.

¹⁶ It is possible that part of the political instability plaguing Colombian politics during this period was due to *La violencia*, a period of civil conflict in rural areas of Colombia that did not end until 1958. In fact, in several early issues of *Plástica* the staff addressed this civil unrest on their editorial page. However, for the purposes of this paper I am focusing solely on the government's contribution to the magazine and the magazine's response to that support.

¹⁷ Felipe González, “Alianzas para la autonomía,” in *Plástica Dieciocho*, ed. Grupo de Investigación en un Lugar de la Plástica (Bogotá: Fundación Gilberto Alzate Avendaño, Universidad de los Andes, Facultad de Artes y Humanidades, Comité de Investigación y Creación, Departamento de Arte, Ediciones Uniandes, 2007), 42. La División Nacional de Extensión Cultural [es] responsable de gestionar y ejecutar las políticas de fomento al arte y la cultura.

¹⁸ On May 5th “Gonzálo Vargas Rubiano is named Minister of Education”; on November 9th “Belisario Betancur is named Minister of Education”; and on November 23rd, “Alfonso Ocampo Londoño is named Minister of Education.” María Natalia Paillié, “Cronología,” in *Plástica Dieciocho*, ed. Grupo de Investigación en un Lugar de la Plástica (Bogotá: Fundación Gilberto Alzate Avendaño, Universidad de los Andes, Facultad de Artes y Humanidades, Comité de Investigación y Creación, Departamento de Arte, Ediciones Uniandes, 2007), 260.

¹⁹ González 42. Durante la dictadura se suspendió el programa de Salones Nacionales; pero no se tomaba esta medida con fines represivos, sino por falta de organización que generó inestabilidad en el Ministerio de Educación.

²⁰ Judith Márquez, “Arte y Sociedad,” *Plástica* 1.1 (1956): 13. Vamos a decirle [al Ministro de Educación] en sucesivas entregas de “PLASTICA”, cuáles son aquellos problemas, confiados en su patriotismo y su fina sensibilidad por los asuntos de la alta cultura.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Redacción Plástica, No Title, *Plástica* 1.6 (1957): 5.

²³ Walter Engel, “I Bienal Interamericana de Arte,” *Plástica* 1.9 (1957): between pages 14 and 15. Cada país invitado podrá enviar 40 pinturas y 40 grabados, o sea seleccionando a 20 pintores y 20 grabadores, cada uno con dos obras.

²⁴ Ibid. O la entidad en quien se delegue esta facultad [...] un Comité Ejecutivo local integrado por las personas que designe.

²⁵ Ibid. Sería urgente que los envíos a la Bienale de [...] Ciudad de México se organicen cuanto antes.

²⁶ Redacción Plástica, “IV Bienal de Sao Paulo,” *Plástica* 1.6 (1957): 4. Si tres artistas (Obregón, Ramírez Villamizar y Silva Santamaría) tendrán allí sendos cuadros, ello no significa una representación oficial de Colombia, sino de la Unión Panamericana que tendrá su propio pabellón. ¿No sería posible que el Ministerio de Educación iniciará inmediatamente las gestiones tendientes a asegurar la participación colombiana en este certamen? Para la difusión en todo el mundo (revistas, periódicos y críticos de todos los continentes comentan ampliamente los detalles de la Bienal) de nuestro arte, representa más la inversión de los pocos pesos que requeriría el flete a Sao Paulo; más mucho más que los diez mil pesos que le van a ser entregados a un pintor a fin de año.

²⁷ Throughout my paper I refer to a monolithic international art world, with the implication that Latin America was part of this group. For the purposes of this paper, I generalize the international art world. However, future research should tease out what I am generalizing since it is possible that the Sao Paulo Biennial carried a different weight than a European biennial; or a Latin American philosopher carried a different weight than a European one. I sense that there must be nuances within the international art world during this period, but the purposes of this paper are not dedicated to that topic.

²⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 224.

Doris Bravo: Curriculum Vitae Narrative

A recent graduate from the master's program in Art History at the University of Texas at Austin, Doris Bravo will remain in Austin to begin her doctoral studies in Art History in the Fall of 2010. Before coming to Texas, Bravo graduated from the University of Chicago with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Latin American Studies and Spanish Language and Literature, and a master's degree in the Social Sciences. While at the University of Texas Bravo has been the recipient of several fellowships and grants; in December of 2009, through a *Permanent Seminar in Latin American Art /CLAVIS-Center for Latin American Visual Studies Research Grant*, she traveled to Argentina and Chile to conduct research for her master's thesis. As a graduate student at the university, Bravo has worked as a teaching assistant for Dr. Andrea Giunta and is currently a Graduate Research Assistant at the Blanton Museum of Art, where she works with the department of Latin American Art. Bravo is also treasurer of the Graduate Student Art History Association and was a Graduate Student Assistant Organizer for the *Transnational Latin American Art: International Research Forum for Graduate Students and Emerging Scholars*. She has participated in two conferences on campus, presenting papers related to her thesis on Gonzalo Díaz and the Colombian art publication *Plástica*. Her research interests include Chilean and Argentine art from the 1970s through today, with a focus on issues concerning the city and artistic practices during and after the dictatorships.

Hélio Oiticica's *Newyorkaises*: book, web, and mental structure*

The works produced by Hélio Oiticica during the period when he lived in New York (1970-1978) highlights the artist's interest in investigating the elasticity of art rather than producing works successively to the same point of extension. In fact, one can read his whole production as a dance between different states through which art may go.

I ended my phase of founding things, to enter in this much more complex one of expanding energies, as a form of knowledge beyond-art, vital expansion, without prejudices or the ambition of "making history" etc.¹

Oiticica seems to think of art as a dense, multi-dimensional web whose knots are states of invention, without a beginning or an end, states linked by threads that appear and disappear, arriving and departing from each state: a dynamic labyrinth, with intermittent corridors at different heights. His production seeks to launch art to a state that would only be possible by increasing the number of coordinates that define the space of art, thickening it. In this sense, his well known gesture of liberating color from the wall is but a tiny part of his quest to overcome the plane, i.e., surpass the familiar dimensions of art.

Newyorkaises, the book he wrote in New York, is a compilation of proposals from many authors that are "food for the new"², impulses to launch art to another state. *Newyorkaises* is thus a collection of what the artist called "block-fragments"³: "I'm reformulating several ideas, retaking others and assembling a text-montage of excerpts from other artists, writers, essayists, etc."⁴ Oiticica intended to publish *Newyorkaises* through the *Pedra que Ronca* publishing house, run by the late Brazilian poet Waly Salomão⁵.

His own notes, registered in notebooks during the 1960s and 1970s would be part of *Newyorkaises* also as fragments for his montage. Thus, among the drafts for *Newyorkaises* one finds excerpts such as the following, which cites Arthur Rimbaud, John Cage, and his own notebooks

* This article is derived from the second chapter of my Ph.D. Dissertation (University of São Paulo, Brazil, 2007). I would like to thank Prof. Celso Favaretto, whose comments and criticism were fundamental for this research.

¹ "encerrei minha época de fundar coisas, para entrar nessa bem mais complexa de expandir energias, como uma forma de conhecimento 'além da arte'; expansão vital, sem preconceito ou sem querer 'fazer história' etc. CLARK, Lygia e OITICICA, Hélio. *Lygia Clark – Hélio Oiticica: Cartas, 1964-74*. Luciano Figueiredo (org.). Rio de Janeiro: UFRJ, 1998, p. 129 (letter from 23/12/1969)

² OITICICA, Hélio. "Drop by drop notes", 28/08/1978, BRAGA, Paula (org.) *Fios Soltos: a arte de Hélio Oiticica*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2008, p. 359.

³ OITICICA, Hélio. "Vendo um filme de Hitchcock, 'Under Capricorn'", 1974. Project HO/ Archive HO 0318.74-15/24. Some of the blocks Oiticica planned for *Newyorkaises* are "Bodywise", "World-shelter" (where the lyrics of Rolling Stones' song "Gimme Shelter" play an important role), "Rap in progress" (interviews he recorded with some of his friends), "Brazilian Experimentality" (samples of what Oiticica considered the best Brazilian art production), "White on white" (on the several meanings of the color white in his oeuvre), "Cosmococas" (investigations with suprasensorial states), and "Subterranean Tropicalia Projects" (sketches for labyrinths). Each block refers to other ones, as if he had planned them simultaneously.

⁴ CLARK, Lygia e OITICICA, Hélio. op.cit., p. 219 (letter from 01/24/1972).

⁵ Interview to Gardênia GARCIA, "O Artista da Terceira Margem". *Arte Hoje*, 2, n. 16, Rio de Janeiro, October, 1978.

(ntbk):

Titles: as in NTBK 2/73 p. 51

RIMBAUD: Illuminations

Veillées

(just estrophe no. 1)

* JOHN CAGE; SILENCE P. 133

(xerox from original for exact format)

All things..... nothing

*(SEE: NTNK 2/73 p. 85)

These drafts have the speed of glimpses, of a flux of thought that cannot be interrupted for the transcription of the whole excerpt of a work he cites. In a letter to Lygia Clark, one of the artists he quotes in the book, Oiticica signals his expectations for the book:

Lygia, I'll tell you something, a secret: all the revelation and writings that I have accumulated in a year for this publication, it feels to me like most of it has never before been cast in the worlds of arts/ philosophy/etc., and at the same time, it exists but is not known. I feel as if sat in dynamite, so expressing something your own correctly and efficiently is more than important; it's a way of making it known and showing (to whoever has the eyes to see) that these arguments are not only of greatest importance but also the only ones of any importance and the highest expression of what is proposed, as everything else, and especially in the shitty empty art criticism and theory that is done here (...)⁶.

Inventors

While writing *Newyorkaises* as a text-montage, Oiticica investigates the cinematographic image. In a partnership with Neville D'Almeida, he explores slide projections to expose the illusion of the cinematic experience, substituting the 24 frames per second by a series of slides, prioritizing what they named "successive static positions".

During the Oiticica and D'Almeida experiments with cinema, Henri Bergson, a philosopher scholars often associate with Oiticica's experiments with color of the early 1960s, reappears like a curve on the Möebius strip: in *Creative Evolution*, Bergson dedicates a chapter to the "cinematographic mechanism of thought and the mechanistic illusion". The cinematograph creates an illusion of movement by quickly juxtaposing static images. However, what the machine does is

⁶ CLARK, Lygia e OITICICA, Hélio. op. cit. p. 225-229 (letter from 07/11/74)

to confer a “general movement” (that of the machine) to what has been photographed. One loses the interior movement, the inner duration of the photographed object. Our knowledge works in a similar manner: “Perception, intellection, language so proceed in general. Whether we would think becoming, or express it, or even perceive it, we hardly do anything else than set going a kind of cinematograph inside us.”⁷ We think the moving through unmoving images.

One can read *Newyorkaises* following the idea of “successive static positions.” There is a continuity of inventions, although presented in “moments”, instants of creation which Oiticica copies to his encyclopedic book. *Newyorkaises* denounces the cinematic mechanism of thought and shows, as if projecting slides, blocks that build the art at which Oiticica aims. The real movement that will confer “live-action” to these blocks resides in the reader and the consequences each one sets in motion.

Using preexistent blocks to build new blocks is a strategy Oiticica called “World building world”:

in my initiatives of appropriation/ absorption/ *togethernation* of fragments that structure themselves in blocks or propositions I seek the non-limitation in homogeneous groups or casts: I drive myself to what bumps into my head: that which is open and not satisfied with the “done”: a JOY of discovering (oneself) WORLD building WORLD ⁸

This strategy reminds one of Bergson’s notion of invention as a combination of preexistent units:

Consider the letters of the alphabet that enter into the composition of everything that has ever been written: we do not conceive that new letters spring up and come to join themselves to the others in order to make a new poem. But that the poet creates the poem and that human thought is thereby made richer, we understand very well: (...) ⁹

The worlds Oiticica joins in *Newyorkaises* are the concepts developed by *inventors*, a term he appropriates (and innovates) from Ezra Pound. In the book *ABC of Reading*,¹⁰ published in 1934, Pound defends selectivity of references and the use of texts by specific authors as measuring tools to discern good poetry from bad poetry. The comparison of a poem to exemplary productions would reveal its value as literature. Such a “lab method” consists in collecting some glass “slides” – in the sense of those used in microscopy – or specimens to which other material would be compared, a method that counterposes attempts to theoretically or conceptually define what good literature is.

⁷ BERGSON, Henri. *A Evolução Criadora*. Bento Prado Neto (trad.). São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2005, p. 331. The translation to English is from the 1911 edition (Henry Holt and Company Publishers), translated from French by Arthur Mitchell.

⁸ OITICICA, Hélio. “Vendo um filme de Hitchcock, ‘Under Capricorn’”, op.cit.

⁹ BERGSON, Henri. *A Evolução Criadora*, op.cit., p. 260-262

¹⁰ POUND, Ezra. *ABC of Reading*. Faber and Faber Limited: London, 1961. For a translation in Portuguese, see POUND, Ezra. *ABC da Literatura*. Augusto de Campos e José Paulo Paes (trad.). São Paulo: Cultrix, 1970.

Oiticica read Ezra Pound's works¹¹ and his friendship with Brazilian poets Haroldo and Augusto de Campos probably reinforced his contact with works such as the *ABC of Reading*, translated into Portuguese by Augusto de Campos and José Paulo Paes. One of the sentences Pound writes in this book, "News that stays News"¹², is used by Oiticica to explain what invention is in the text "Homage to my Father", from 1972.

POUND: Literature is news that STAYS news.

Nothing new-consumerism but *invention to invent news* is new not new-consumerism

(...)

news new not news absolut news newsance¹³ newsinvented new

scrapnew news no-scrap-revival¹⁴

The title "Homage to my father" is telling: Pound's laboratory method may have impressed the son of photographer and entomologist José Oiticica Filho, whose professions relied on the use of "slides", in both senses of the word – photographic and scientific. Hélio Oiticica's father began working with photography precisely to improve his scientific studies on butterflies and other insects.¹⁵ Pound mixes art and science, substituting the abstract definitions of aesthetic value with the laboratory. emphasizing concrete comparison, direct examination: what is the distance between the poetry under examination and the specimens selected by Pound (which include Chinese literature, and in the West, names that range from Sappho to Rimbaud) ?

We have a clue here to understanding *Newyorkaises*: Oiticica's written work -- that reveals his method of inventing by joining fragments from other authors – has the laboratorial character of collecting exemplary slides. Going back to the *Cosmococas* photo-slides, one can easily identify some of the specimens Hélio Oiticica and Neville D'Almeida collected: Luis Buñuel in CC1, Yoko Ono in CC2, Marilyn Monroe¹⁶ in CC3, John Cage in CC4, Jimi Hendrix in CC5.

¹¹ See CLARK, Lygia e OITICICA, Hélio. op. cit., p. 219.

¹² POUND, op. cit., p.29

¹³ The word "newsance" joins new, nonsense and the French words *naissance* (birth) and *nuisance* (danger)

¹⁴ OITICICA, Hélio. "Homage to my Father", 08/03/1972. Project HO/ Archive HO 451.72

¹⁵ In 2007, the exhibition "José Oiticica Filho – fotografia e invenção", at Centro Hélio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro, explored the links between the scientific and artistic oeuvre of Hélio Oiticica's father, as well as the exchanges between the two artists.

¹⁶ All of the characters are mentioned as having built exemplary works in Oiticica's text about the *Cosmococas* in BRETT, Guy et al. *Hélio Oiticica*, exh.cat. (1992-1997). Rotterdam: Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art; Paris: Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume; Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies; Lisbon: Centro de Arte Moderna da Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian; Minneapolis: Walker Art Center; Rio de Janeiro: Centro de Arte Hélio Oiticica, p. 174. Marilyn Monroe is also cited in OITICICA, Hélio. *Aspiro ao Grande Labirinto*, Luciano Figueiredo; Lygia Pape; Waly Salomão (orgs.), Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1986, p. 75.

Besides the slides, Oiticica borrows from Ezra Pound the terms “inventor”¹⁷ (“men who found a new process, or whose extant work gives us the first known example of a process”) and “diluter” (“men who came after the first two kinds of writer [inventors and masters], and couldn’t do the job quite as well”), which will be central in his thought during the seventies. For Oiticica, the real artist is the inventor. An invention is something that cannot be diluted:

The artist can only be an inventor, otherwise he is not an artist. The artist must conduct the participator to a state I call “state of invention” (...) The artist can only be conceived as such if he arrives at the great state of invention, a point at which one no longer deals with trivial little inventions, detail invention. It’s the great invention [that matters]. The great invention is immune to dilution. Thus the distinction between masters, diluters and inventors becomes outmoded; what matters is the inventor: the rest is no longer interesting as phenomena of the artistic and creative process (...) 18

Oiticica considered other options for the title of his book: *Newyorcases*¹⁹ (as in boxes), *Neykosmosis* (mixing *kosmos* and *osmosis*), *Neykosmaises* (mixing *kosmos* and possibly maze). Each alternative suggests important concepts in Oiticica’s thought: the idea of osmosis is bound to appropriation; the word *kosmos* ended up making up part of the title of one of the blocks in the book, *Cosmococas*; *Cosmos* and *maze* point to a notion dear to Oiticica: the constellation of inventors.

IC – Do you see a link between what you do and other artists?

HO – I see a link of inventor families... of bright points as Haroldo would say paraphrasing Pound, who by his turn paraphrased Dante... There are things in history that are always interesting (...) The state of invention is profoundly lonely, but it’s profoundly collective. There is something I always mention and which is constant in me, something I consider very important, that I discovered in New York, it’s a Sartre’s thing, when he talks about the position of the artist and the creator in the current world, that we are in a phase of the emergence of the collective, we are passing through, from the individual, from individualistic values, to the collective, so we are actually divided between the most individual but at the same time immersing in the emergence of the collective.²⁰

¹⁷ Pound classifies artists as inventors, masters, diluters, good writers, writers of *belles lettres* and starters of crazes.

¹⁸ OITICICA, Hélio. Audio of interview to Ivan Cardoso, 1979.

¹⁹ The manuscripts that lists several options for the title of the book mentions that the final choice, *Newyorkaises*, is a mix between English and French. It’s possible that Oiticica was thinking on the French word *caisse* (box) since he lists the option “*Newyorcases*”. One may speculate about the relations between *Newyorkaises* and Marcel Duchamp’s boxes containing reproductions of his own works and handwritten notes. Both in Duchamp and in Oiticica the idea of the artist as a multiplicity (in Duchamp’s case *Rrose Sélavy* and *R. Mutt* illustrate the argument) is central.

²⁰ OITICICA, Hélio. Audio of interview to Ivan Cardoso, 1979.

The links Oiticica establishes with his “family of bright points” are more surprising and tangled than a linear heritage relation, and do not fit into a master-disciple model. He simultaneously praises inventors from all ages and rejects the past – what is new will always be new, never past. When citing an artist from a past century he is by no means proposing a revival, but acknowledging the return of singularities, or better “singultaneities”²¹, a neologism that joins singularity to simultaneity, coined in a letter to Haroldo de Campos, in 1974, in which Oiticica remarks on his friend’s poem that juxtaposes Heráclito, Sousândrade, Byron, Motokiyo Zeami (the author of Noh theater play *Hagoromo*²²) and Oiticica himself.

Your page-homage is not only something awes me but also something that grows more and more each time I read it: I and my ignorance decyfered even Greek without knowing origin or language: as stated by POUND, first the sonority, then the search for other meanings (...). I-they-grow: genealogicaly (...) block-makes-block: in the page’s confrontation (...) free fragmentation of the will to “make a poem”: Mutuous scrapping: each verbal measure is YES in relation to the other: SIMULTANEOUS YESSING: VOILÁ!: SINGULTANEOUS (what a term full of pregnancies, isn’t it?) (...)

“Singultaneous”, “simultaneous yessing”, is the simultaneous affirmation, the affirmation which is singularity in any age, in any time. Even coming from the past, the singularity continues to be present (news that stays new), exactly like a bright point of light in the sky, a star that might not exist anymore when its light reaches us.

The Carnival Block

Oiticica identifies the structure of autonomous units organized to form a whole (world building world) in the description of a Carnival “block” Cacique de Ramos²³ given by his friend and artist Carlos Vergara. The full transcript of a talk between Oiticica and Vergara about the Cacique de Ramos block would be included in *Newyorkaises* under the title “Rap in progress”.

During the talk on the Cacique de Ramos block, the two artists discuss the crowd that takes part in the carnivalesque block, building one body. As stated by Vergara “the block does not demand from you a special performance as a samba dancer, it demands from you a will to join the

²¹ The importance of the neologism “singultaneous” was suggested to me by Gonzalo Aguilar who has published several articles on the links between Oiticica and the Campos brothers. See AGUILAR, Gonzalo. “In the White Forest: the veiled dialogue between Hélio Oiticica and Augusto and Haroldo de Campos” in BRAGA, Paula (org), op.cit.,p. 250-257.

²² For more on the links between the *Parangolés* and *Hagoromo*, see CAMPOS, Haroldo de, “O Músico da Matéria”, *Folha de S. Paulo*, caderno Ilustrada, 16/02/1992.

²³ A Carnival block is an ensemble of hundreds of people who parade through the streets during Carnival. A Carnival block is smaller than a School of Samba and has a less rigid organization. In a block, people dress a pre-defined costume (or invent their fantasies following a pre-defined theme) and sing and dance through the streets. Some common themes for a block are men dressing like women, fantasies and masks mocking politicians, etc.

phenomenon, collective, that's the sole demand imposed by the block (...)"²⁴. To enter the Cacique de Ramos block, one only needed to buy a fancy dress and attach tape strips to the face, imitating native-Brazilian facial makeup patterns. The two artists note that through this mark of belonging, each participant developed his/her distinction since they would each wear the tape strips in a different manner: "then they are 5,000 people, one different from the other". The conversation between Oiticica and Vergara progresses in a crescendo as Vergara describes the block performance, up to the moment when part of the dress that covers the body is thrown into the air. At this point, Oiticica replies in great excitement: "and then when it comes back it falls back!"²⁵

Someone from within the block throws the dress upwards in a gesture of pure fun and euphoria. Someone who was not part of the block picks the dress up from the ground and places it on his/her head, and at that moment becomes part of the block, carrying the dress, like an inheritance: "when the block reaches Rio Branco avenue, it is dotted with outsiders that have been incorporated, get it? Such a crowd."

The block has no hierarchies, or any rehearsed dance. Collective creation, with a minimal protocol such as the use of facial marks made of tape, the carnival block – music, rhythm, dress and above all, the body – is for Oiticica, alongside the rock concerts of the late sixties/early seventies, a form of emergence of the collective. The block is also characterized by being a flux, a walk: a moving world built by other simultaneous moving worlds.

Galaxy

Oiticica once described the field of experimental art with a rhizomic image: "the loose threads of the experimental are spring energies for an open number of possibilities."²⁶ The lightness of this image is corroborated by another expression, "luminous points":

Mondrian, for me, is one of these luminous points... actually, there are points and luminous points... the tendency is to exist only luminous points, the artist that mediates does not interest any longer, the non-inventor artist does not interest any longer, so for me only the luminous points interest: the artists who are great inventors.²⁷

Connected, the luminous points form a galaxy that can be understood as the "heaven" of a

²⁴ OITICICA, Hélio and VERGARA, Carlos. Audio from 10/28/73, (Héliotapes), for the series "Rap in progress". Audio transcription made by Eugênio Bressane in 08/20/81. Project HO/Archive HO 0504/73.

²⁵ I discuss in other texts the importance of Friedrich Nietzsche's work in Oiticica's thought. In this sentence, Oiticica is clearly referring to Nietzsche's idea of the eternal return.

²⁶ OITICICA, Hélio. "To Experiment the experimental", 1972. Published in BRAGA, Paula (org.), op. cit. , p. 347-351.

²⁷ OITICICA, Hélio. Audio of interview to Ivan Cardoso, 1979.

world model very faithful to the earth: it is on the web of inventors that Oiticica's "artistic metaphysics" might reside.

Brazilian poet Haroldo de Campos provided the best association between heaven, lightness, and Hélio Oiticica's work. Even before defining the parangolé as a hang-glider of ecstasy, an image attached to the visual aspects of Rio de Janeiro, the poet had compared Oiticica's invention to the feather cloak of Noh play *Hagoromo*. The feather cape was left behind on earth by the angel Tennin, "a sort of lunar fairy or nymph"²⁸ who, to recover it, has to dance for a fisherman. Haroldo de Campos narrates: "When she dances, the blessings fall from the heaven, the gifts, on the earth, and the play ends with the cape dissolving into the sky of the sky, i.e., into the white on white, into the ether of the ether. A suprematist end."²⁹

In a well known text, "Notes on the Parangolé", Oiticica writes that dance reveals the structure of the work, its layers, the several pieces that make it. Dancing with the "cloak" parangolé, the participator receives the greatest blessing, the "magical life experience" given by the "ambiental space."³⁰

Besides associating the parangolés to flight, Haroldo de Campos insists on the idea of lightness by emphasizing the transparency and luminosity of the threads that appear as the building material for Oiticica's nests. The transparent thread is also the material that builds parangolés such as *Cape 23 M'way Ke*, and the delicate walls in Oiticica's labyrinth maquettes.

Haroldo de Campos identified a "quality similar to that of spatial knots" in the "plastic nests made up of luminescent threads" he found in Oiticica's apartment in New York. Inside the nests "one might become integrated and entangled, and assume a condition between fetal and aerial; like a sort of luminous, gravity-free placenta, a pregnancy without gravity which he opened up to spatial flight."³¹

On the top of a New York building, Oiticica produced photos of his friends wearing parangolé capes. The actor Luís Fernando Guimarães appears wearing *Parangolé Capa 23*, made of a diaphanous screen, as if awaiting favorable winds to float into the sky. Thicker lines – the seams – connect the apices of the transparent structure in which he is enveloped, the geometry of which reminds one of the *Spatial Reliefs* series, from the late 1950s, fluctuating structures that, loose in the air, suspended by a thread, with several faces of an overlapping, intersection of planes in circular motion.

The thread, as the building material of the nests or the structure that connects and intercepts

²⁸ CAMPOS, Haroldo de. *Hagoromo de Zeami: o charme sutil*. São Paulo: Estação Liberdade, 1993, p. 13.

²⁹ CAMPOS, Haroldo de. "Hang-glider of Ecstasy" in BRETT, Guy et al., op.cit., p. 217-221.

³⁰ OITICICA, Hélio. "Notes on the Parangolé" in BRETT, Guy et al., op.cit., p.93.

³¹ CAMPOS, Haroldo de. "Hang-Glider of Ecstasy" in ibid., p. 217.

the artists and thinkers cited by Oiticica in *Newyorkaises*, is a magical space of gestation. From the points of intersection defined by loose threads, the invention of Hélio Oiticica emerges.

Publicity as an Art Form: David Lamelas's *Publication*
Daniel R. Quiles

In 1970, David Lamelas produced *Publication* through Nigel Greenwood Gallery: an exhibition consisting of a 38-page pamphlet with responses to a series of three statements sent to thirteen artists and writers involved in conceptual art, including Daniel Buren, Victor Burgin, Gilbert & George, Lucy Lippard, and Lawrence Wiener.¹ The statements read as follows:

1. Use of oral and written language as an Art Form.
2. Language can be considered as an Art Form.
3. Language cannot be considered as an Art Form.

These statements were given to the previous list of artists and critics for consideration. Their responses are published in this book, which constitutes the form of the work, presented first in Nigel Greenwood Inc Ltd London, between the 23rd of November and the 6th of December 1970.

I do not take part in the responses to the statements since, as a receiver of all the contributions, my reference is prejudiced.

My choice of the three statements does not imply agreement or disagreement with any of the three statements.²

Less than two years after the artist's relocation to London from Buenos Aires in 1968, he presented the exhibition pamphlet itself as a work of art. This paper argues that *Publication* is representative of a larger effort by Lamelas to transpose key conceptualist strategies developed in Argentina to an international context. Along with a number of his other works from this moment, *Publication* reflects upon how networks sustain artistic communities across international borders. Exposing a normally private exchange of ideas to a larger public, Lamelas conflates the internal and external faces of such formations. Yet *Publication* was not only "about" publicity and networks; it also functioned as publicity itself, furthering, at least in appearance, the artist's integration into an exclusive conceptualist orbit.

Born in 1944 in Buenos Aires, where he studied painting and sculpture at La Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes Manuel Belgrano, some of Lamelas's earliest works featured large, colorful geometric elements that were attached to or protruded from gallery walls. *Pieza conectada a una pared* [*Work Connected to A Wall*], installed at Galería Guernica in 1964, features two column-like extensions propped against the wall that led down to a polygonal floor sculpture. In literalizing a movement from the vertical exhibition space of painting to the horizontal and three-dimensional area of sculpture, this work occupies the position between painting and sculpture that Donald Judd would designate a "specific object" in 1965.³ North American sculptors such as Anne Truitt would not have been Lamelas's only starting point, however, as the transition from modernist abstraction to colorful hybrid forms incorporating both two- and three-dimensional elements had already occurred in Brazil in the late 1950s with the emergence of *neo-concreto* and artists such as Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark.⁴

From late 1965 forward, Lamelas was exposed to the nascent aesthetics of Oscar Masotta, an autodidact who published widely on literature and philosophy in the late 1950s and emerged as a Lacanian cultural theorist in the early 1960s, whereupon he had a brief but profound engagement with the Buenos Aires art world. After co-founding an art and theory department with César Jannello at the Universidad de Buenos Aires in 1964, Masotta became affiliated with the Di Tella's Centro de Artes Visuales and its director Jorge Romero Brest. This provided access to younger *porteño* artists in the orbit of the Di Tella such as Eduardo Costa, Roberto Jacoby, and Raúl Escari, with whom Masotta formed reading groups and developed the genre of "media art" in 1966. Lamelas was not part of this closest circle, but he was in ongoing conversation with its members; he later published jointly authored texts with Escari.

The approaches that Masotta contributed to Argentine conceptual art in this incubatory stage feature in his September 1965 lectures at the Di Tella on Pop Art, later published as a book in 1967.⁵ In the text he argues that prior to any discussion of an artist such as Andy Warhol one must have a basic understanding of semiotics. Warhol's approach to mass media imagery, for Masotta, consists in separating the signified, or "message," from the more material signifier, or "code." This places the focus on the viewer, and his or her potential ability to intuit the code that normally operates unseen to transmit a message. Masotta terms this process of becoming conscious of the code "apperception," which he describes as a "reflexive, highly intellectual principle proper to certain mental operations." He cautions that apperception cannot be an instantaneous realization, but one resulting from an analytical process facilitated by the artist, through two related strategies: "redundancy" and "discontinuity."

Redundancy involves the reinforcement, via repetition or patterning, of familiar terms. It thus corresponds not only to Warhol's use of mechanical reproduction to multiply the same image over and over again, but his extraction of the mass media image from its context in the first place. The image is signaled—placed, effectively, in quotation marks—and the moment that this occurs, it is no longer doing its original job of advertising or informing. Apperception takes place when, in effect, the system at hand ceases to function; when the code, not the message, is the subject of attention. Discontinuity, on the other hand, consists of breaking up the work of art into discrete units so that instantaneous reception is impossible. In Warhol discontinuity can be found in his reproduction techniques, which create slight differences from one image to the next. "His multiplications," Masotta writes, "do not pretend to *express*, but, I would say, to *signify*... that is *that they want to make us feel the presence of the code*. ...In Warhol... intention opens onto a field of logical relations, that is to say: onto a code; or indeed, and that called a *structure*..."⁶ As

with redundancy, discontinuity interrupts the transmission of the message so that the viewer can analyze the system. Thus there is a connection between the reading and breaking of any given system. In Masotta's own work *El mensaje fantasma*, posters were put up in the center of Buenos Aires that announced a television broadcast four days later, whereupon the announcer noted that four days before a poster had appeared in the street. The media of street advertising and television were fed into one another, redundantly pointing to one another. In so doing, their message became one another—no other message was possible.

Lamelas took up similar strategies in the field of sculpture. *Conexión de tres espacios* [*Connection of Three Spaces*], winner of a special prize at the Premio Di Tella in 1966, was deployed throughout three different galleries of the Institute. A 2.6 meter-high rectangular fluorescent light box can be seen propped against one wall. Two smaller, unlit rectangular forms protrude from the opposite wall. A molding along the bottom of all of these forms leads the viewer around the wall to another room, where a sculptural form lines the right angle of the wall, and a fluorescent light occupies the angle between the wall and the floor. Beyond this room lies a completely empty and darkened space.⁷ It is the viewer who establishes the connection between the three spaces by navigating them, gradually adding up the effects of discontinuous elements. In Masotta's terms, *Conexión de tres espacios* produces an apperception of the codes of the exhibition context, as though cataloguing the roles of walls, floors, angles, and lighting. This apperception cannot be thought apart from the mission of the particular space in which it was installed. Opened in 1963 under the post-Perón surge of developmentalism and situated in the city's gallery district, the Di Tella was designed as an emblem of a sophisticated national art production and a corresponding viewing public. Lamelas took this enlightenment to its logical

and destructive limit. Once glimpsed, the codes that allow the contemplative institutional space to function are broken, and the exhibition site, not the work, becomes the object of attention.

In 1968, Lamelas exhibited at the Venice Biennale and remained in Europe afterwards rather than returning to military-controlled Argentina. He remained abroad after the Biennale, settling in London and taking courses at St. Martin's College of Art with John Latham, Barry Flanagan and others.¹ He immediately began exhibiting throughout Western Europe and building relationships with gallery owners and other artists. "London was extremely fruitful for my work," Lamelas recalls in an interview with John Roberts, "[...]So-called "conceptual art" was indeed an international phenomenon. Use of this term was a way of grouping together various artists with similar concerns, from all over the world. I was not particularly conscious of my own national identity. Because of my youth I was not set in my ways and I tried to become as English as possible. The discovery of the current youth culture... made me feel just like another young Londoner."⁸

In terms of work, however, Lamelas continued to explore issues that he had first encountered in the Buenos Aires context. Among his first works in Europe were *A Study of the Relationships Between Inner and Outer Space* and *Antwerp-Brussels (People and Time)* (both 1969). The former is a 16-mm film that begins by "analyzing" different architectural features of the Centre's gallery, such as floors, walls, and angles of the ceiling [Figure 5]. Then the focus shifts to people: workers at the museum recite their titles and job descriptions. The film's

¹ In terms of conceptualism, the United Kingdom is the opposite of the French, Italian, and Spanish milieus where Greco traveled in the early 1960s: the conceptual art devised there is known for its austere refusal of marketability. Lamelas was certainly acquainted with such artists; he exhibited in a show curated by Art & Language member Charles Harrison and included Gilbert and George in *Publication*. But he did not restrict himself from traveling to the continent and making connections there; *Publication* and several other of his works from the early 1970s are records of his quite international network of associates. London was also home to Guy Brett and Signals Gallery, arguably the most welcoming institution for Latin American artists in Europe in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which would have given Lamelas the chance to meet, among many others, Brazilian artists such as Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark.

purview of the “inner and outer space” of the institutional context broadens from there into surrounding London, but it is noteworthy that two types of people appear: these museum functionaries and random passerby in the street, people integral to the art context and people wholly external to it. *Antwerp-Brussels (People and Time)* is a series of photographs of local artists, dealers, and collectors, among them the artist himself, Marcel Broodthaers, Anny de Decker (of Wide White Space Gallery, Lamelas’s gallery in Antwerp), and dealer Kasper König, set against urban backdrops in either city. Each individual is identified underneath the photograph and centered and shot at some distance to include views of the city around them. As in the initial series of talking heads in the gallery in *Inner and Outer Space*, these seemingly arbitrary urban subjects turn out to be the network that makes the work possible, the individuals whose labor and interests support and condition the very artistic investigation that has, in turn, framed them as objects. Both of these works essentially dissemble their contexts, taking them apart into different people who help to keep the art world running. Once glimpsed, however, these integral parts cannot operate inconspicuously; the promotional position has entered the field of the work.

In 1970, Lamelas made the film *Interview with Marguerite Duras*, in which the writer is shown at her home being interviewed by Raúl Escari, a member of the Masotta circle from Buenos Aires who had emigrated to Paris and whose voice is heard off-camera.⁹ It was exhibited with ten still photographs taken during the session—the shutter can be heard on the soundtrack—and ten panels of text, maintaining the practice of three “levels” of information that undercut one another slightly.¹⁰ While the filmed encounter provides an illusion of access to the writer, the photographs refuse it. They echo the inherent quality of film, which is itself composed of many such separate still images, and undermine the reliability of the documentary format. The dialogic

scenario of the interview, in which the subject is probed for supposed insight into his or her work or personal life, undergoes same redundant analysis that Masotta had directed at other mass media operations.¹¹ It is not the content of the interview but its structure that is under consideration.

There were several preliminary versions of *Publication* that were altered in the final project, such as a round table discussion, a recording of which would be typed in the catalogue.¹² Lamelas's notes for the work include a drawing of a table with positions marked for the different participants, next to which he wrote, "A situation produced for me about a certain specific subject... arts matter."¹³ The final version kept a trace of this earlier idea by placing six copies of the publication on a round table, as though at the places of different participants.¹⁴ But an important shift was made from face-to-face group dialogue and mediation through recording to propositions and responses sent through the mail, breaking up the interaction and making it collective only in the final assembly. Lamelas takes care to note his objectivity and lack of opinion or "prejudice," even though it is his statements that initiate the responses. The resulting responses by artists took the form of texts of varying lengths, some more serious essays on the question of the legitimacy of language in art, others more poetic or humorous responses. Lippard's text was presented as the "property" of Douglas Heubler, who then "loaned" it to the work. Martin Maloney's page consisted of a poem suggesting that "the word rejects objects"; some sections of the poem also resemble structuralist diagrams. After the responses there is a final section titled "Oral Language." The pages that follow are blank, attesting to the unwriteable character of speech and also to the idea that the reader might add his or her own response.

Marcel Broodthaers, whose contribution was too late for Lamelas to include it, submitted a drawing of a fish with a quotation mark for an eye. Beneath the fish are answers to each of the three statements: “1. Oral Fish Eye,” “2. No,” and “3. Yes.” As a caption to the drawing, “Oral Fish Eye” underscores the multiple senses implied in “Use of oral and written language as an Art Form,” which appears to give both spoken and written language (seen by the eye) equal weight. “Fish,” however, suggests a remainder, something visible that is outside language, which might preclude the domination of language by art. In the three statements, however, Lamelas does not endorse any such hierarchy. As in *Interview with Marguerite Duras*, *Publication* extracts a dialogic process inherent in spheres of cultural production and places it under the spotlight of the signal and its implied analytic operation. He breaks it apart, makes it readable, and disables it. In a 1972 interview Lamelas argues that “Too much emphasis has been placed upon the statements in the book because of the dialectic implied by ‘language as an art form.’ The question of language is explicit because it is also the subject of the book, but I was interested in the context not the subject.”¹⁵

Publication bears a resemblance to an unrealized work of 1967 by Margarita Paksa titled *Mesa redonda: esto es un juicio* [*Round Table: This is a Judgment*]. A close associate of Lamelas, Paksa proposed an artists’ panel as a work of art in its own right, to be set in the Di Tella itself. The questions would be formulated in advance and mailed to participants along with the invitation. The artists’ panel would be physically elevated in relation to the audience, to “highlight the position of art, on a preferential plane, above, as if it had an aura.”¹⁶ A light would illuminate the given artist respondent, who would remain silent as his or her response was broadcast via audiorecording. At first these recorded answers would match the question they were following, but as the event went on their order would be jumbled so that they would answer

the wrong questions. The audience would effectively be attending a roundtable that had already occurred; the relation of speakers to audience was to be temporally discontinuous. *Mesa redonda* directs the audiorecording against its normative function: the authoritative documentation of unique instances of information to critique the convention of the artists' roundtable that accompanied many of the exhibitions of contemporary art at the ITDT.¹⁷ Rejected by Romero Brest for obvious reasons, *Mesa redonda* would not have merely been a cynical portrait of the predictability of art world publicity. Its implications stretch to the pre-made nature of utterance in general, which precludes the expression of original ideas in all speech contexts.

Paksa's proposed work sheds light on the crucially *dysfunctional* dimension of *Publication*. The statements that precede the artist pages are not arguments for or against language in art or conceptual art; the first statement is not even a full sentence. Upon close inspection the apparent conversation about these topics breaks down into the individual responses that never cohere into a whole. They are grouped together because the exhibition and its attendant publication have done so. The catalogue ceases to function as a supplement to an exhibition, becoming instead a self-reflective document of the show's conditions of possibility. Statements 1 and 2 speak to a possible aesthetic platform—that language can in fact be art—while statement 3 states the implicit dominant position, which would define art on more traditional grounds. Crucially, Lamelas himself does not take “a position,” precisely because he is holding the entire project up to scrutiny. If, however, the group is redundantly signaled, no collective position can be advanced—other than publicity about the semblance of a position. *Publication*'s several-pages-per-artist format is paralleled by that of larger group exhibitions of this moment such as the *Arte de sistemas* shows organized by Jorge Glusberg at the Centro de Arte y Comunicación, as well as *Information* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in

which artists were similarly allotted a page or two pages in a catalogue to make individual statements that presumably contributed to a larger whole.¹⁸ Such shows, Lamelas suggests, are always already discontinuous, even as they construct seeming unities.

Yet if *Publication* does not truly cohere as a collective statement, it does stand as incontrovertible proof of Lamelas's membership in a close-knit yet international network of conceptual artists—a group of artists who really were in ongoing dialogue about the legitimacy of language as an art form. *Publication* is a critique of an international conceptual art network in the moment of its formation, as though Lamelas's entry into this milieu could be simultaneously experienced and analyzed. It exposes the implicit connection between avant-garde activity and publicity, a point that Alexander Alberro has made in relation to the North American variants of conceptual art promulgated by Seth Sieglaub and others.¹⁹ Yet it also functions as *real* publicity, as a kind of proof that Lamelas had indeed arrived in Europe and could command the attention of name artists. His contention that he simply shed his Argentine identity upon arrival in London is fulfilled in his literal insertion into a collaborative practice, however self-critical it appears to be. In this sense, *Publication* has it both ways. It analyzes itself to the point of dysfunction but somehow *still* succeeds in promoting Lamelas.

Lamelas continued to include European and American colleagues in his work through the 1970s, as in *London Friends* (1973), in which the artist photographed himself and others in his London milieu in the manner of spreads for fashion or celebrity magazines. The insertion of fiction—the conceit that they are celebrities—into this constellation of art production and reflection about it alters Lamelas's method, introducing an element of fantasy into otherwise sober processes of analysis.²⁰ Fiction opens the tautological trap of signaling and disabling—allowing for new possibilities of message and structure to become legible even as self-reflexivity

about code is maintained. Leaving the self-destructing closed circuit of *Publication* behind, Lamelas's work would follow this direction for the remainder of the decade.

¹ The full list of participants is Keith Arnatt, Robert Barry, Stanley Brouwn, Daniel Buren, Victor Burgin, Michel Claura, Gilbert & George, John Latham, Lucy R. Lippard, Martin Maloney, Barbara M. Reise, Lawrence Wiener, and Ian Wilson. Seth Sieglaub, Hanne Darboven and Marcel Broodthaers were also originally invited, but Sieglaub and Darboven declined to participate, and Broodthaers' response arrived too late to be published. Sieglaub sent Lamelas a letter dated August 21, 1970 in which he claimed to be "phasing out my involvement in the Art world" and that in any case "it has become a 'matter of policy' for me never to write anything." In an interesting comment given the nature of the *Publication* project, which precisely made Lamelas not just artist but curator and promoter simultaneously, Sieglaub lamented that some had confused him with a practicing artist himself. "One problem I had in the Art world was that people confused and compared my role of an organizer with that of an artist. Which has never been my intention." He offers to get Lamelas in touch with Lucy Lippard and Ian Wilson, who both participated in *Publication*. David Lamelas Papers, Getty Research Institute Special Collections, Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

² David Lamelas, *Publication* (London: Nigel Greenwood Gallery, 1970), p. 1.

³ Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," *Arts Yearbook* 8, 1965, pp. 74-82. See James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

⁴ See Guy Brett, "A Radical Leap," in *Art in Latin America*, ed. Dawn Ades (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 253-283.

⁵ Oscar Masotta, *El pop-art* (Buenos Aires: Columba, 1967).

⁶ *Revolución en el arte*, pp. 152-153.

⁷ Katzenstein, *Lamelas*, p. 38.

⁸ "Interview with David Lamelas," in John Roberts, ed., *The Impossible Document: Photography and Conceptual Art in Britain 1966-1976* (London: Camerawork, 1997), pp. 135-136.

⁹ Duras, who during World War II worked for the Vichy government while also participating in the Resistance and whose husband barely survived a Nazi concentration camp, fits the model of a politically engaged cultural figure that Lamelas would focus upon repeatedly in his work of this period. That many of her works deal with traumatic gaps in subjective historical records makes her a particularly appropriate choice for an artwork in which the cultural producer's recollections are mediated by recording media. See Jane Bradley Winston, *Postcolonial Duras: Cultural Memory in Postwar France* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

¹⁰ "'Interview' with Marguerite Duras," in *Luxonline*, [http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/david_lamelas/interview_with_marguerite_duras.html].

¹¹ This tension between photograph and film would be explored in subsequent works such as *Film Script* (1972), in which a storyboard was displayed in the gallery, as though spatializing the moving film that would normally be contained to a screen and unfolded over time. This work makes for a fruitful contrast with that of Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica, who was also in London around this time, whose *Cosmococas* (1973, with Neville D'Almeida) created similar interplays between still images (overlaid with lines of cocaine to emphasize their "frozen" quality) and projected images in a plush environment setting. This is an illuminating difference with Lamelas, who keeps the focus on the juxtaposed media; for Oiticica it is the experiential dimension for the spectator that is most important, for Lamelas the analytical. See César Oiticica Filho, *Hélio Oiticica / Neville D'Almeida*, exh. cat. (Buenos Aires: MALBA, 2005), and Charles LaBelle, "Hélio Oiticica," *Frieze* 64 (Jan.-Feb. 2002).

¹² "Publication (1970)," Box 2, Folder 1, David Lamelas Papers, Getty Research Institute Special Collections, Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

¹³ Box 2, Folder 5, David Lamelas Papers, Getty Research Institute Special Collections, Getty Museum, Los Angeles. The original plan was to gather the participants in a single space to discuss the three "statements": "ROUND TABLE. Six persons to take part. Three statements to be considered: 1. Use of oral and written language as an Art Form. 2. Language can be considered as an Art Form 3. Language cannot be considered as an Art Form. A tape is to be taken of the complete discussion. From this tape, a text will be made. The complete text will be available in a catalogue form.

¹⁴ *A New Refutation of Time*, p. 74.

¹⁵ “Extracts from an interview with David Lamelas,” December 1972, typed text in the Papers of David Lamelas, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

¹⁶ Paksa, “Mesa redonda: esto es un juicio,” in *Proyectos: sobre el discurso de mi*, p. 44. “Round Table: This is a Judgment,” in *LHN*, p. 243.

¹⁷ Roundtables such as these accompanied both *Experiencias Visuales '67* and *Experiencias '68*. Audiorecordings of these roundtables, directed by Romero Brest, are included as CD-ROMs with the text *Arte como provocación*.

¹⁸ Curator Kynaston McShine refers in his catalogue essay to dictatorships in Latin America and included a number of Brazilian neo-concretists and conceptualists as well as a one-time collaboration from several Argentine artists who called themselves Grupo Frontera that drew from prior media art, in particular Minujín’s work: a taping area in which visitors were filmed answering a survey of questions, and a set of televisions farther on in the exhibition at which they were shown their responses. See Ken Allan, “Understanding *Information*,” in *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice*, ed. Michael Corris (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 144-168, and Kynaston McShine, *Information*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970).

¹⁹ See Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

²⁰ This practice continues in *Rock Star (Character Appropriation)* (1974) and *Los Angeles Friends (Larger Than Life)* (1976). In the former, a series of photographs of Lamelas with long hair and a guitar preening in generic rock n’ roll poses, likens art-world success to that of becoming a famous rock star. *Los Angeles Friends* comprises a series of drawings of Lamelas’s circle in Los Angeles, the appearances of which oscillate between fetishistic fan drawings and criminal sketches.

Abstract:

This article explores the trajectory of Brazilian artist Antonio Dias between the mid-1960s and the early 1970s by examining the work against critical background provided by two commentators of his work at that time: critic Mário Barata and fellow artist Hélio Oiticica. The methodological goal of this juxtaposition is to draw attention to the critical debates that informed the turbulent artistic scenarion in Brazil at that time.

Barata's articles bring to light an aspect of Dias not often emphasized: his earlier commitment to informal abstraction, an artistic tendency that enjoyed great prestige in early 1960s Brazil. Barata tries to refer Dias's acclaimed production in the mid-1960s back to his earlier informalism, so as to relativize the influence of a newly-rediscovered Neoconcretism. Most importantly, the critic's awkward response to Dias's radical change to a more sober, language-based aesthetics later in the decade highlights the radical stakes Dias was embracing. This shift is further explored with recourse to an introductory text Oiticica wrote at Dias request, but which remained unpublished. Using this text as a starting point, the article finally aims at exploring the visual dialogue between the two artists, both of whom were then experiencing crucial moments in their respective careers (Oiticica wrote the text in the aftermath of his 1969 Whitechapel Gallery show, in London, as he developed his concept of *Creleisure*).

A Not-So-Foreign View: Antonio Dias in Milan

Sérgio Bruno Martins

By the time the 22-year old Antonio Dias left Brazil, early in 1967, his work had already crystallized into a so-called ‘Antonio Dias style.’¹ Effectively launched at Dias’s 1964 one-man show at Galeria Relevô, in Rio de Janeiro, the ‘style’ probably remains the best-known period of the artist’s production; its striking characteristic is a profusion of violent graphic signs and visceral entities, both in the form of painted elements and amalgamated soft constructs [figures 1-2]. These were usually distributed along square sections and subsections reminiscent of comic strips; no straight narrative, however, took place, and viewers were invited to engage in a free-associative exercise sparked by suggestive, but somewhat cryptic titles. However, after a very brief transitional period in Paris [figures 3-4], Dias moved to Milan and quickly abandoned most of these recognizable signs in favour of works that display an extremely arid conceptual sobriety, implying a sense of calculated, if hermetic, precision [figures 5-6].

I want to address this shift, but neither in terms of its continuities and discontinuities nor simply as a matter of internal, stylistic coherence. I see it rather as a key for questioning positive, encapsulating definitions of the Brazilian avant-garde – both in relation to the Brazilian context and internationally. It’s useful in this sense to discuss two immediate responses to Dias’s new works – both written in 1969 by Brazilian authors in Europe: critic Mário Barata, an early advocate of Dias who acted as a newspaper correspondent, and Hélio Oiticica, then involved with the aftermath of

¹ Critic Vera Pedrosa employs this very expression: ‘Although it is a logical continuation of his earlier work, all has changed when it comes to the so-called Antonio Dias “style”.’ Vera Pedrosa, ‘Conversa Puxa Conversa’, in *Correio da Manhã*, 13/08/1968.

his Whitechapel show in London. While Barata was more concerned with Dias's paintings, Oiticica's text was meant to be the introduction of a small book Dias had conceived, containing ten drawings. These are intertwined works: Dias's so-called 'project-book' contained '10 plans for open projects', diagram-like projects for a number of his subsequent paintings (and for other works as well) [figures 7-9].²

As these two responses are read in tandem, Dias's shift becomes recognizable as a mark of double-negativity. On the one hand, looking back at his formative years in Rio de Janeiro – and thus following the pace of Barata's own engagement with Dias – it becomes clear that the artist was eventually confronted with the need of negating his own, earlier gestures of revolt, which now struck him as tokens of a depleted 'stylistic vice'.³ On the other hand, his new procedures (which evidently involved a heightened level of artistic self-reflexivity) were played out in the context of a redefining encounter with the international avant-garde. The prevalence of displacement as a theme in the new work, as in *Anywhere is my Land* (1968, figure 5), attests to that, and also indicates that Dias was not simply displacing himself from his earlier context, but also marking his own position in this new scenario (and most specifically within the universe of Conceptualism) as that of an odd-man out.⁴ Aspects of his earlier negativity, in this way, would be retained, recast and redeployed vis-à-vis the developing international insertion of his art.

As a matter of fact, both writers raised a number of similar questions about the works; most crucially, both describe the enigmatic aspect of the new works not as

² Dias's description is in Hélio Oiticica, 'Special for Antonio Dias Project-Book,' unpublished manuscript dated 06/12/1969, Projeto Hélio Oiticica document number (hereafter abbreviated PHO) 0306.69.

³ Dias as quoted by Pedrosa, *op. cit.*

⁴ Dias was keen to mark that position and remembers that an *Art & Language* member once said that these arid, black works were 'too surrealist'. See Antonio Dias, interview with the author, unpublished, 07/05/2009.

aloof, but, on the contrary, as a strategy for redefining the encounter with the spectator. Nevertheless, my interest here lies not in a thorough comparison of both responses, but rather in tracing in both the particular movements and the stakes of this constitutive negativity that, in my view, hinges Dias's shift. As we will see, such an enquiry is particularly pertinent in relation to Oiticica in that it allows the works of both artists come into critical friction.

Informalism

Barata's account of Dias's 1969 Studio Marconi show is evidently shot through with perplexity: it reads as a struggle of the critic with the inadequacy of his own vocabulary to account for the new work. Interestingly enough, it is precisely this difficulty that seems to render the article unexpectedly suggestive. For one thing, interpretive habits associated with the 'Antonio Dias style' are demolished, or even reversed, with particular emphasis to new work's refusal to evoke psychological interiority (a trait the critic himself used to stress).⁵ Barata sees Dias's painting becoming 'opinionated' rather than 'confessional', a reversal that forces him to abandon existential and/or romantic speculations in favour of investigating the kind of responses the paintings elicited from the spectator. True, the critic engages in somewhat idiosyncratic digressions that turn the viewing subject into a composite array of 'mental vectors' that 'oscillate' between the 'enigmatic function' of the paintings in relation to their titles and their actual visuality. But in a sense, and despite the somewhat awkward choice of terms here, Barata's description actually prefigures a later, celebrated formulation by critic Paulo Sergio Duarte, about Dias's works

⁵ See, for instance, Mario Barata, 'Imagística de Antônio Dias', *Jornal do Commercio*, 02/07/1967; and also 'Antonio Dias expõe em Berlim', *Jornal do Commercio*, 25/02/1968.

demanding a certain kind of ‘strabismus: one eye at what is displayed, the other at the formulated problem.’⁶ This point is a reminder of the persistence of the strong phenomenological thrust that informed many Brazilian artists at that time, even as they got visually closer to a seemingly arid conceptualism – holding on still to the irreducibility of phenomenal experience. Dias’s own insistence of thinking his works in terms of them being *objects* – a point I will return to in the discussion of Oiticica’s response – indicates how important this particular specificity was for the artist himself.⁷

But, if Barata’s interpretation does actually contribute to an understanding of Dias’s new works vis-à-vis international Conceptualism, the critic’s perplexity is all the more telling as one considers Dias’s role in the 1960’s Brazilian avant-garde. In fact, the negation of the ‘Antonio Dias style’ could not but have a strong significance for Barata. In an earlier text on the *New Brazilian Objectivity* show, he states that the Rio de Janeiro avant-garde ‘is highly indebted [...] to painters who have gone through the informal [abstraction] and through the graphism of artistic “writings” like Antonio Dias’.⁸ Barata refers to Dias’s very early works [figure 10], but the point becomes even clearer once one learns that the critic’s own involvement with avant-gardism was somewhat odd: he had supported, in the 1940s, artists identified with social realism, like Cândido Portinari – with few exceptions, this was a generation mostly rejected by the Concrete-oriented groups and by the 1960s avant-gardists. Quite coherently, Barata’s engagement with abstraction largely bypassed the whole Concrete/Neoconcrete debate in favour of informal currents.⁹

⁶ See Paulo Sérgio Duarte, *Antonio Dias*, Rio de Janeiro : Funarte, 1979, p. 21.

⁷ Mention Dias’s letter to Oiticica?

⁸ Mario Barata, ‘Nova Objetividade no MAM’, *Jornal do Comércio*, 07/05/1967.

⁹ See Barata’s interview in Fernando Cochiarralle and Anna Bella Geiger, *Abstracionismo Geométrico e Informal: A Vanguarda Brasileira nos Anos Cinquenta*,

It is not surprising, then, to see how he further historicized this supposed ascendancy of informalism over the 1960's avant-garde: 'Only in a second, recent stage, parts of the geometric-oriented and formalist avant-garde, which had been important in the Rio de Janeiro concrete movement, would join those of a neo-figurative character, helping, in a fertile coexistence, to "dialectize" and to enlarge the creative areas of Brazilian art, and also to stress the constructive side of the *assemblages* or objects created by a part of the current avant-garde'.¹⁰ Significantly, one of the aims of *New Brazilian Objectivity* was to display a brief history of the object in Brazilian art, which meant an unavoidable review of Neoconcretism; Barata's talk of geometric-oriented art acting only in a 'second stage' is thus an evident attempt to downplay the generative role of geometric abstraction. My point here is not to cast Barata as the polemist he was not, but simply to stress how highly staked on Dias was his own position as an avant-gardist critic – and, not unimportantly, to demystify the apparently univocal ascendancy Neoconcretism sometimes may appear to have over all subsequent Brazilian art.

Enigmage

And then there is the other overt aim of *New Brazilian Objectivity*: a response to Pop Art. Most leading avant-gardists at that time voiced suspicions about what they regarded as the widespread circulation of Pop and Op imagery in Brazil (with special emphasis to the former). However, unlike the radical rejection espoused by far-left advocates of popular art, the avant-garde approached Pop from an anthropophagic distance: that is, it rejected Pop's ethos whilst absorbing aspects of its strategy and

Rio de Janeiro : Funarte, 2004, pp. 114-118. For biographical information on Barata, see José Roberto Teixeira Leite, 'Lembrança de Mário Barata', in *A Revista Eletrônica DezenoveVinte*, vol. 3, n. 1, January 2008.

¹⁰ Barata, 'Nova Objetividade no MAM', op. cit.

procedures. It was, in short, an attempt to fight fire with fire: the Pop primacy of the image would be not simply imitated, but redeployed in order to create, as Oiticica put it, a distinctive way of linking ‘imagetical relations and social-political implications’.¹¹ One important point to bear in mind here is the exact understanding Oiticica, Dias and others had of Pop: most of its defining works were seen for the first time late in 1967, at the 9th São Paulo Biennial – after the *New Objectivity Show*, that is. Before that, their access to Pop was mostly via black and white, small-scale reproduction in newspaper and magazines.¹² Pop was thus very strictly understood in terms of its iconography rather than of its often complex pictorial procedures; this iconography was further taken face-value for its apparent political complacency (even an experienced critic like Mário Pedrosa subscribed to this simplistic view, in a text about Dias, stating that ‘It was a matter [for the Pop artists] of coolly verify what was going on and to produce not for aesthetes, but for normal “consumers”’).¹³ Oiticica’s *Tropicália* (1967, figure 11), for example – to take a work that was first showed in *New Brazilian Objectivity* – was then meant to counter the homogeneity of the Pop imagery with the excessive proliferation that marked the quick deployment of its own images. Dias’s paintings shared this ethos, but its weaponry was, I have already described, the loose, free-associative character of its violent, disruptive imagery. In a number of texts from the mid-1960s, Barata mostly reinforces this kind of reading – the work as a distinctively Brazilian reworking of Pop – whilst adding other lines of interpretation that were also not uncommon at that time (and that the artist himself often endorsed): the work as consisting of repressed childhood memories; as drawing on the artist’s psychological interiority in order to produce social chronicles of

¹¹ Hélio Oiticica, ‘Tropicália, The New Image’, unpublished, PHO 0535/69.

¹² Dias, interview with the author, op. cit.

¹³ Mário Pedrosa, *Dos Murais de Portinari aos Espaços de Brasília*, p. 218.

violence and warfare; the work, then, as a mix of autobiography and social/artistic context.¹⁴

Oiticica, however, would rapidly reconsider his own strategy. He came to see the *New Brazilian Objectivity* as partially flawed within its own premises, as ‘entirely immersed in this “Pop” language, hybrid for us, in spite of the talent and strength of the artists involved.’¹⁵ In addition to that, we must but remember how displeased he was with the aftermath of *Tropicália* and the quick recuperation of its imagery, which eventually became fashionable and was thus stripped of its interventional character.¹⁶ Once again, his case is analogous to that of Dias; only that Dias read his own case in terms of stylization. Oiticica would indeed praise the younger artist’s turn in his 1969 text, terming some of the new works *enigmages* – a hybrid of ‘image’ and ‘enigma’ – and thus locating them in relation to the aftermath of the *New Brazilian Objectivity*:

‘Antonio Dias’ experience emerges from a superlative imagetical vision, towards its synthesis – the enimage, by creating monuments: the open participation, provoking a synthesis of his iconographical tendencies (the necessity of continuously building images).’¹⁷

By describing how Dias overcomes the ‘necessity of continuously building images’, Oiticica alludes to the understanding of the works – often endorsed by Dias in the mid-1960s – as obsessive renderings of psychological interiority just in order to leave it aside. So far, this could be simply regarded a more sophisticated version of

¹⁴ Barata, ‘Imagística de Antonio Dias’, op. cit.

¹⁵ Hélio Oiticica, ‘Tropicália’, in *Hélio Oiticica*, exhibition catalogue, Rio de Janeiro : Centro de Arte Hélio Oiticica, 1992, p. 125.

¹⁶ Oiticica discusses this recuperation in a number of texts. Relevant ones include Oiticica, ‘Tropicália’, op. cit.; and Oiticica, ‘Tropicália, The New Image’, op. cit.

¹⁷ See Oiticica, ‘Special for Antonio Dias Project-Book’, op. cit.

Barata's opposition between the 'confessional' and the 'opinionated'. However, and most importantly, Oiticica is adamant in that he describes a *synthesis* – if Dias's experience has its origin in the 'superlative' imagery of the 'Antonio Dias's style', it is now informed by a negativity and thus dialectically turned into the enigma:

'the imagetical world is not sufficient, anymore, to express or put through multiple possibilities for the enigma, which would be something related to the creative experience in its origin – it lies in creative simplicity itself: the aim is to put through a creative impulse'¹⁸

It is not simply an amalgamation: the image and that which contains and negates it (the enigma) are actually sublated into the very concept of enigma; the latter thus arises out of the internal contradictions the work eventually encountered. And, even though it is posed as the condition for creative experience, the enigma is also negativity precisely in that it signals the end of imagetical proliferation – of image for image's sake.

Project

Importantly, the affinity between Oiticica and Dias was strengthened by a spontaneous move on the latter's part: it was probably during Dias's visit to London, to see the Whitechapel Experiment, that he first introduced his new works to Oiticica. He afterwards asked Oiticica to write the introductory text from which I quoted the fragments above as an introduction to the offset project-book he was planning to

¹⁸ Ibid.

publish, containing small-scale templates, as it were, for his most graphically clean and conceptually-oriented works.¹⁹

Conceptually-oriented, but to a degree: as the concept of the enigma suggests, if we attempt to understand Dias's turn in Oiticica's terms, then its result is not simply conceptual, but *supra-sensorial*. Far from embracing a dematerialized or over-intellectualized version of the work of art, Dias's projects seek to retain the structure of *objects*, which is to say – within the context of Oiticica's formulation – that they aim at a 'new perceptual behaviour'.²⁰ In fact, this seemingly counter-intuitive insistence on keeping the projects within the register of the object is precisely what seemed to motivate Dias's invitation to Oiticica. Dias demonstrated enthusiasm about the concept of the *probject*, which they had apparently discussed in London (and which would be consequently incorporated by Oiticica in the introductory text).²¹ The neologism evidently brings together the words *project* and *object*, but has also been discussed by Oiticica as alluding to *proposition* and *probability* as well: '[the probject] refers to 'open' propositions made by artists [...]: the object, or the work, would be the infinite probabilities contained in most diverse propositions of human creation'.²²

Implicit in this statement is a precise sense of historical intervention. Firstly, the concept is tributary of Ferreira Gullar's *Theory of the Non-Object*, and even more so of the previous debates over the concept of the object in Concrete-Neoconcrete poetry – the sense the the poem, that the word itself acts as an object – inasmuch as the

¹⁹ Antônio Dias, letter to Hélio Oiticica, unpublished, 04/05/1969, PHO 1535/69.

²⁰ Hélio Oiticica, 'Appearance of the Supra-Sensorial', in *Hélio Oiticica*, op. cit., p. 127.

²¹ The term was originally coined by designer Rogério Duarte. See 'Special for Antônio Dias Project-book', op. cit.

²² Hélio Oiticica, 'The Object', PHO 0152/68 (Published in *GAM*, n. 15, 1968).

reader retains it, keeping its signifying process alive.²³ Secondly, this insistence on a poetry-oriented formulation translates into the non-coincidence of the object of art (as a relation created by the subject) with the art object (as the inert, material work); it counters the superficial fetishization of the object-qua-box that was already visible in the mid-1960's Brazilian artistic scene (to the point that a 'box category' was created in a Salon: as if the box/object was simply another artistic medium that would stand beside painting and sculpture) and that was already one of the targets of the brief history of the object presented in *New Brazilian Objectivity* show.²⁴ Thirdly, and again in relation to the enigma, as this issue emerged in the context of Dias's encounter with conceptualism, the object-turned-probject offered an alternative way of rejecting the regime of rich, visual identification that marked back to the artist's involvement with the Rio de Janeiro avant-garde without being too over-determining; precisely the kind of specificity Dias was eager to mark vis-à-vis the European milieu. The probject thus operated like a conceptual tightrope that incorporated the dialectics of the enigma while simultaneously retaining a phenomenological dimension that would dodge both materialist fetish and intellectualist excess (thus its negative twist).

Oiticica's emphasis on the *openness* of the concept is radicalized in the text on Dias: the word 'open' repeatedly appears, always underlined – he writes of 'open participation', 'open fields', 'open enigma' and 'open exercise of significative behaviour'. Oiticica had just developed his concept – or, in his words, 'permanent proposition' – of *Creleisure* [Crelazer], which was for him the culmination of a long theoretical path including the new objectivity, *Tropicália* and the supra-sensorial. In

²³ Ferreira Gullar, 'Theory of the Non-Object', trans. Michael Asbury, in Kobena Mercer (ed.), *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, InIVA, London, 2005. See also Ferreira Gullar, Oliveria Bastos and Reynaldo Jardim, 'Poesia Concreta: Experiência Intuitiva', in Geiger and Cocchiarale, op. cit.

²⁴ See Paulo Reis, 'Exposições de Arte – Vanguarda e Política entre os anos 1965 e 1970', PhD Thesis, Universidade Federal do Paraná, 2005, p. 127.

this context, *Eden* would then stand as a sort of inaugural laboratory pointing to the need of establishing ‘receptacles open to significations.’²⁵ That said, the actual openness of some of these receptacles was very unorthodox, to say the least. Starting from one of the earlier propositions Oiticica associated with Creleisure, his *Bed Bolide* (eventually incorporated to the *Eden* environment Oiticica constructed for his 1969 Whitechapel show, figures 12 and 13), ‘where one enters and lies down under the jute structure: the concentration of leisure, which tends to fix itself.’²⁶ Oiticica once referred to it as a ‘cage-bed of dream’, and also commented on the difficulty of moving inside it – the paradoxical proposition here was that (cre)leisure required concentration or even discipline.²⁷ In fact, the whole of *Eden* seems to retain a certain sense of order: not only Oiticica writes of it as an ordered trajectory (much like *Tropicália* was), but the *Eden* floor plan is also full of directional arrows that suggest the visitors’ potential trajectories [figure 14].²⁸

Considering this context, a work like *Do It Yourself: Freedom Territory* (1968), which opened the project-book and quickly gained an installation version [figure 15], can be seen as prefiguring a number of concerns Oiticica was developing at that time. With its extremely concise economy, it radicalized the rejection of imagery that concerned both artists at the time and proposed participation in less oriented terms than *Eden* (or rather *disoriented*, and deliberately so: Dias’s diagrams cannot fail to evoke the illustration of the nonsensical map from Lewis Carroll’s *The Hunting of the Snark* [figure 16], which was reproduced in a 1968 article by Robert Smithson, ‘A

²⁵ Oiticica, ‘The Possibilities of Creleisure’, in *Hélio Oiticica*, op. cit., p. 136.

²⁶ Ibid. Stephen Berg translated ‘que tende a se fixar’ for ‘which tends to focus’ – this, I think, loses the sense of self-reflexivity and rigidity present in the original passage.

²⁷ See ‘Hélio Oiticica: Artista de Amanhã’, in *O Globo*, 17/09/1970 and Hélio Oiticica, ‘On the Discovery of Creleisure’, *Art and Artist*, vol 4, n 1, April 1969. PHO 0816/69.

²⁸ Oiticica, ‘The Possibilities of Creleisure’, op. cit.

Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art’ – Dias later acknowledged the profound impact this article had when he first read it in Milan).²⁹ In fact, the only parts of *Eden* that drop orientation are the *Nests* and the empty, circular area Oiticica termed *Open Area of Myth* [figure 17]. It is not a coincidence that both are, in Oiticica’s terms, ‘kept for the end’ and considered to ‘lead to more advanced levels, and indicate a more incisive future’.³⁰ The *Nests* would be the core of Oiticica’s subsequent works in Sussex and then in New York. As for the *Open Area of Myth*, Oiticica states that ‘there is no “proposition” here’; as a space meant for a reflexive act of ‘self-founding’,³¹ it begs proximity with *Do it Yourself: Freedom Territory* in that both seem equally fit for the ‘open exercise of significative behaviour’ Oiticica describes in Dias text – this very description, in its turn, clearly evokes the famous commandment by critic Mario Pedrosa that Oiticica was fond of, namely that art should be ‘the experimental exercise of freedom.’

In theorizing Dias’s work, Oiticica was then simultaneously thinking through his own production. Their dialogue suggests a complexity that bypasses pitfall categories such as ‘latin-american conceptualism,’ while simultaneously acknowledging the formative role, in their production, of the new artistic coordinates they faced abroad. In fact, Dias was not alone in mobilizing a critical sense of displacement: both Oiticica and Cildo Meireles, for instance, participated in the Kynaston McShine’s Information show at MoMA in 1970, and both wrote catalogue statements rejecting that their participation implied representing Brazil.³² It also becomes evident how concepts like ‘participation’ were forged and re-forged in a daily basis, responding to

²⁹ Dias, interview with the author, op. cit. See Jack Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, Berkeley : University of California Press, 1996, pp. 78-94.

³⁰ Oiticica, ‘The Possibilities of Creleisure, op. cit.

³¹ Ibid.

³² See Kynaston McShine, *Information*, exhibition catalogue, New York : MoMA, 1970.

contextual shifts and to exchanges of ideas; these concepts should be regarded less as stable key to artists like Oiticica than as historical cues. Each in their own manner, both Dias and Oiticica actively sought ways of reinvesting the experience that originated in the Brazilian avant-garde in the way they positioned themselves in relation to the international arts scene; and doing so also involved a continuous process of self-criticism. Reconstructing such dialogues is crucial in that it dispels a number of assumptions: reading Oiticica through Dias's lenses may help to undo the vitalist discourse that still clings to interpretations of the former's oeuvre, and which hovers dangerously close to exoticization.³³ Last, but not least, such a dialogue was obviously not without its interruptions and failures – but these are the historian's stock of trade. In 1972, Oiticica revised the text for Dias's book, and Dias, in his turn, discarded a page he had written to accompany the book, and which he now derisively likened to a set 'user's instructions'.³⁴ *Trama*, the project-book, was only published in 1978, ten years after its inception, using sheets of home-made paper Dias eventually produced alongside Nepalese artisans (bringing a further twist to its arid diagrams) – by that time, his work had changed again. And Oiticica's introduction, to which Dias constantly refers in interviews, was ultimately not published. As far as dialogues go, this may well be less a statement of exhaustion than of open-endedness.

³³ See in this respect Michael Asbury, 'Hélio Couldn't Dance', in Paula Braga (ed.) *Fios Soltos: A Arte de Hélio Oiticica*, São Paulo : Perspectiva, 2008, pp. 52-65.

³⁴ Antonio Dias, letter to Hélio Oiticica, unpublished, 04/02/1973, PHO 1426/73.



Figure 1 - Antonio Dias, *Notes on an Unforeseen Death* (1965).



Figure 2 - Antonio Dias, *The Hero's Remains*, 1966



Figure 3 - Antonio Dias, *Dans Mon Jardin*, 1967

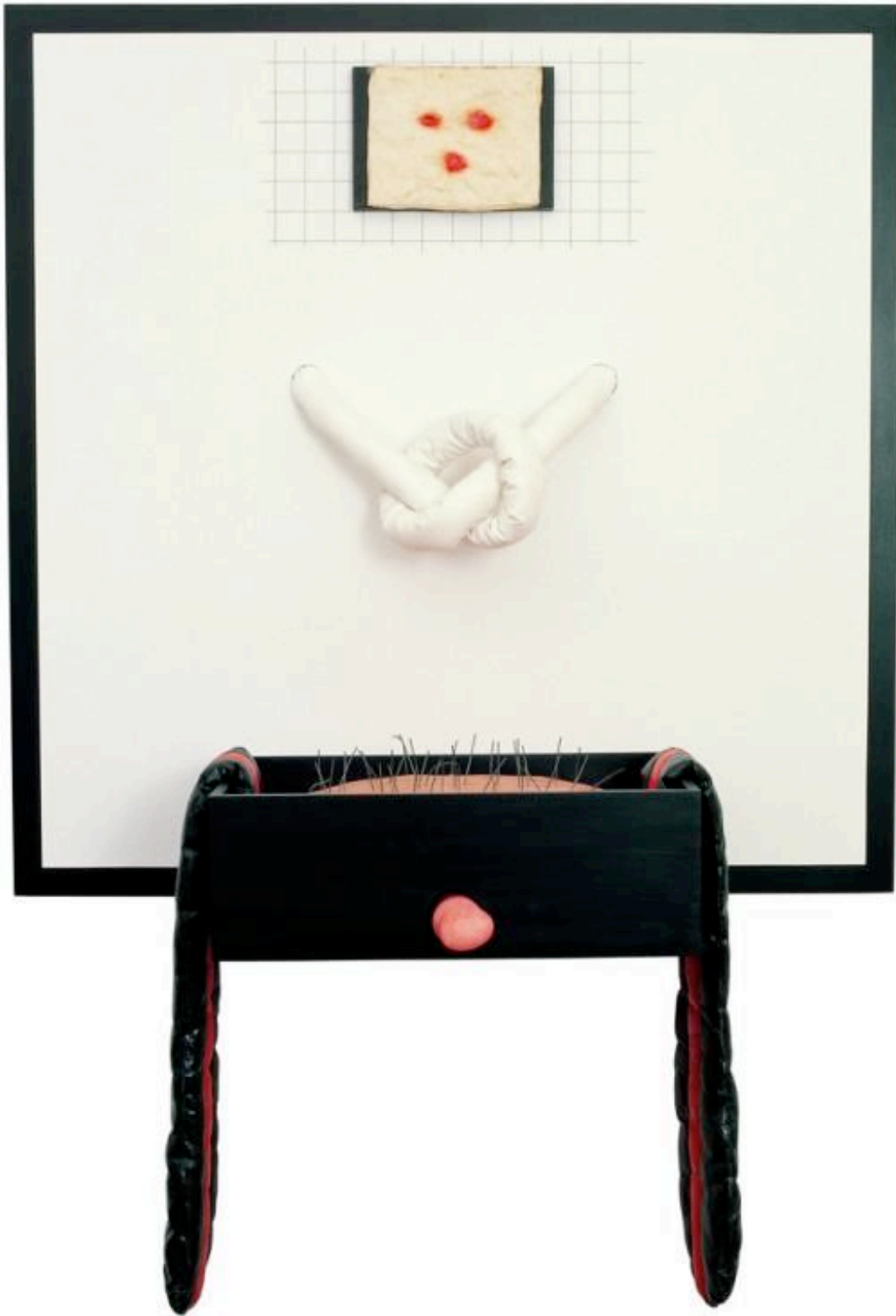


Figure 4 - Antonio Dias, *My Portrait*, 1967

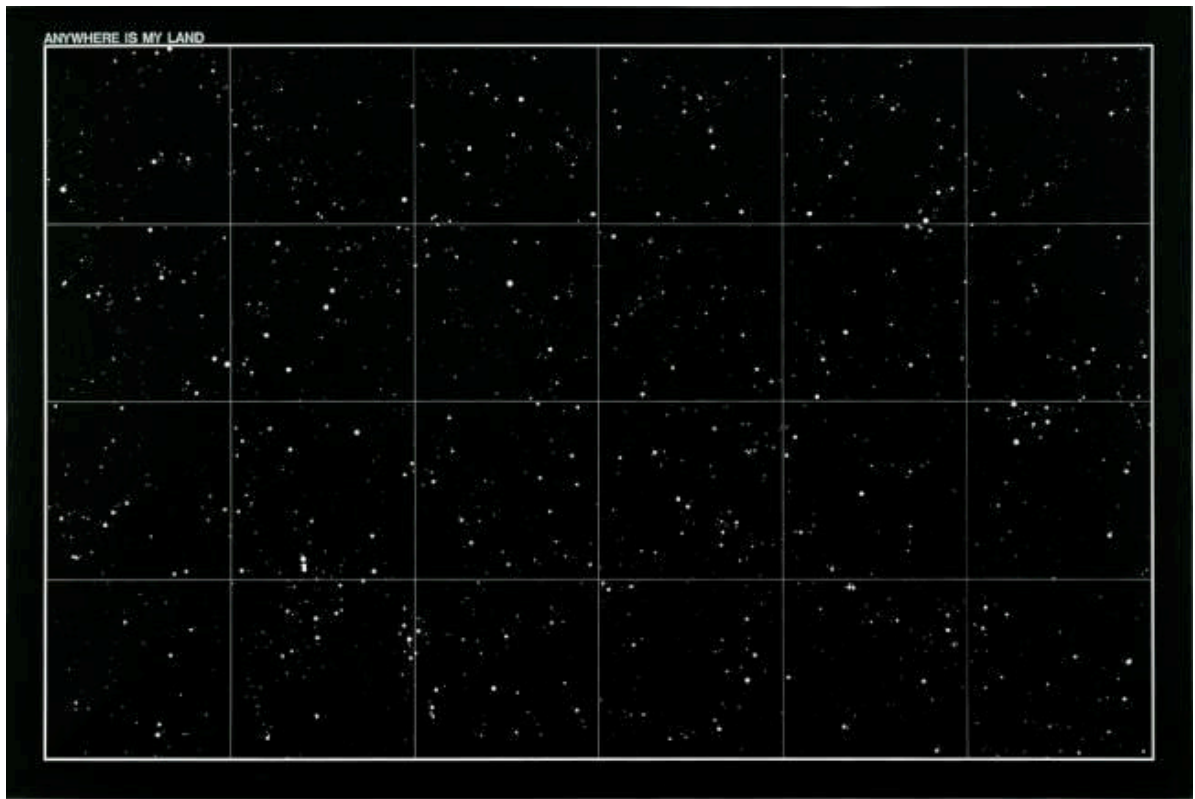


Figure 5 - Antonio Dias, *Anywhere is My Land*, 1968

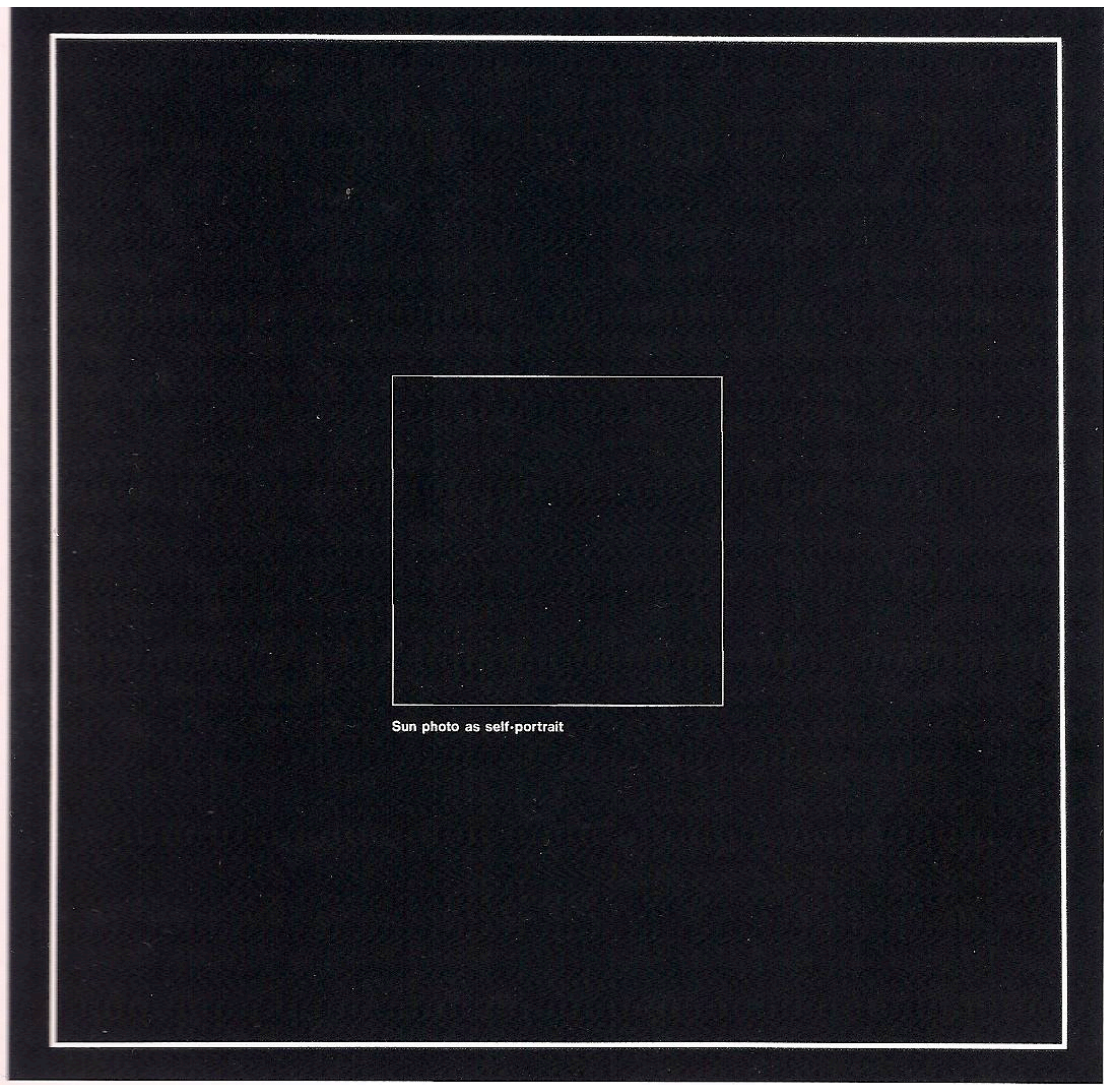
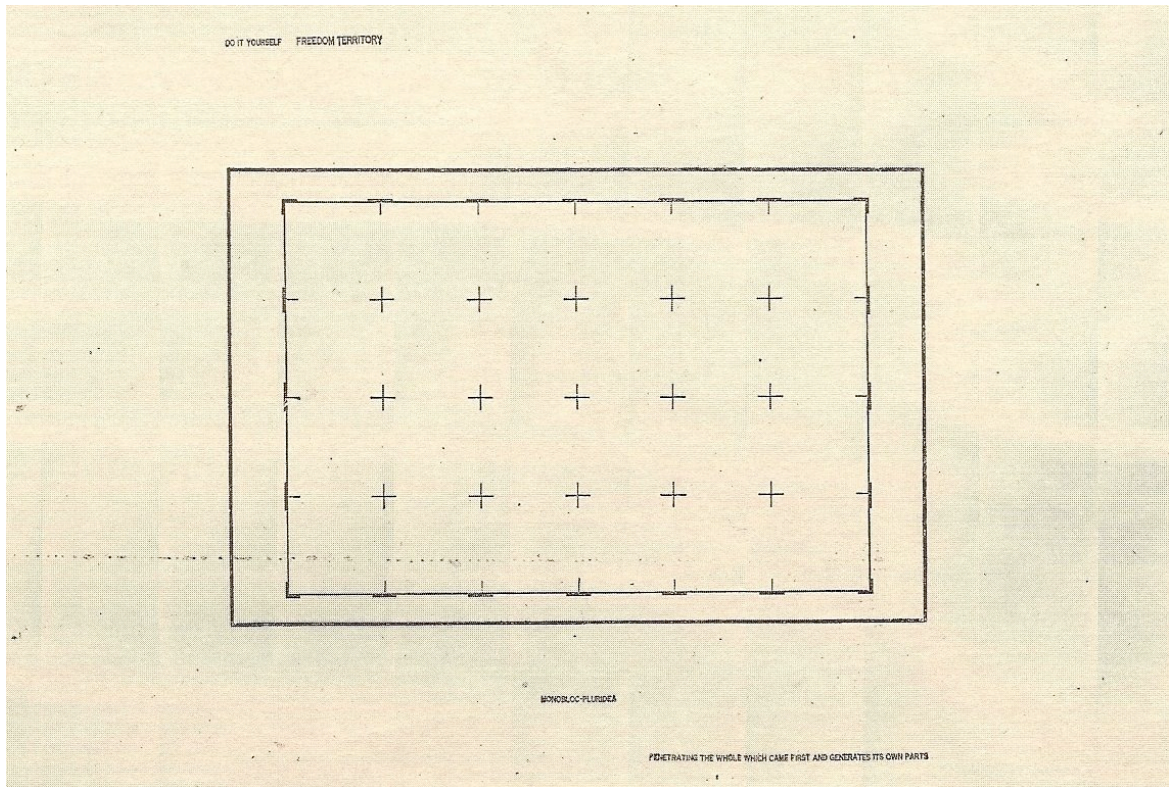
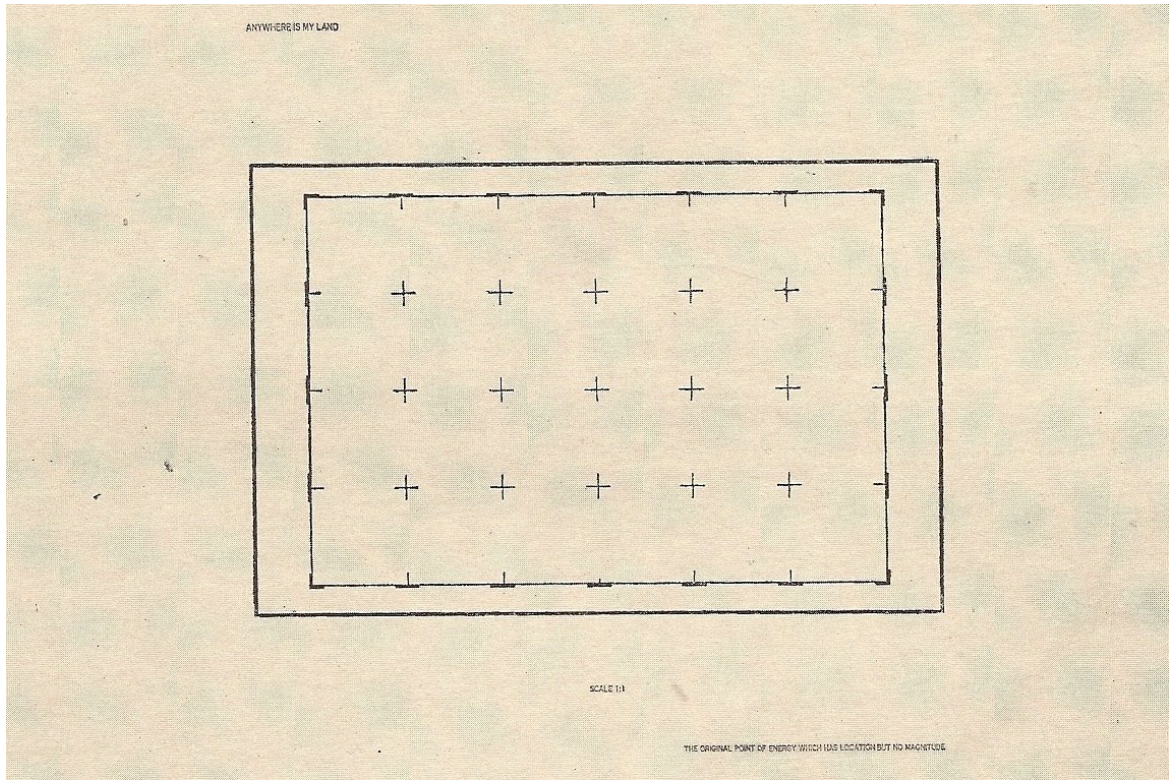
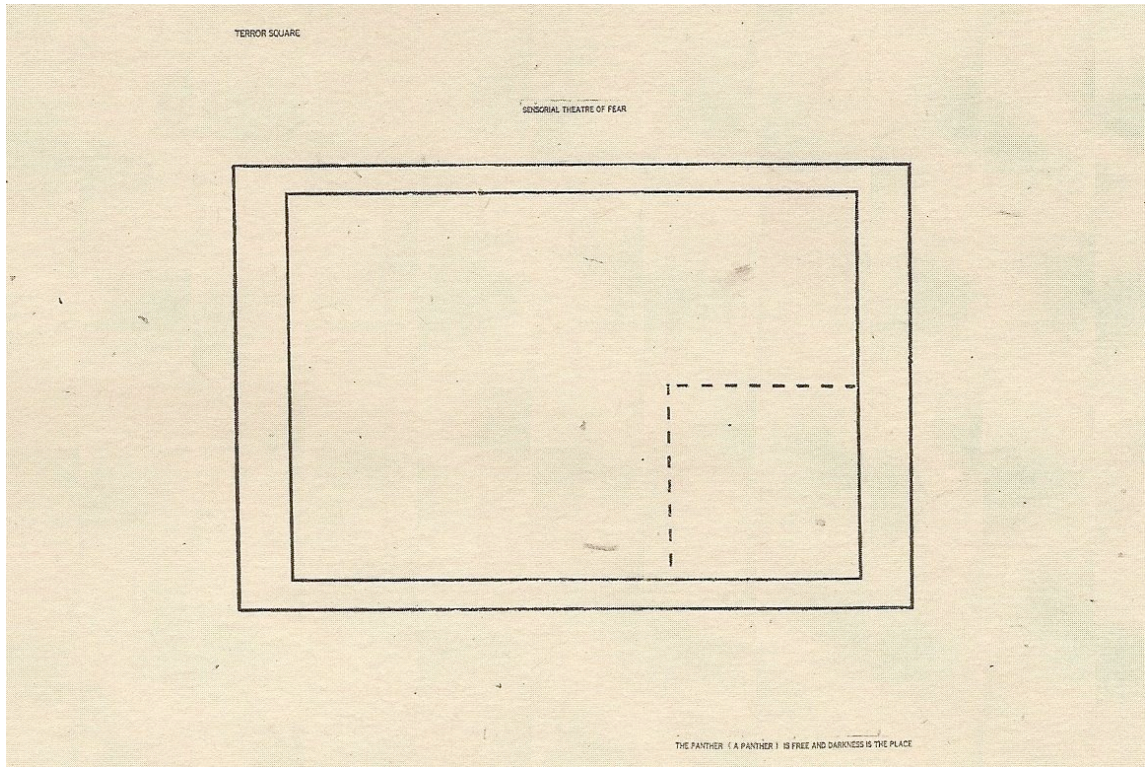


Figure 6 - Antonio Dias, *Sun Photo as a Self-Portrait*, 1968



Figures 7-9 – Selected pages from Antonio Dias, *Trama*,



Figures 7-9 – Selected pages from Antonio Dias, *Trama*,



Figure 10 – Antonio Dias, *Batalha*, 1962



Figure 11 - Hélio Oiticica, *Tropicália*, 1967



Figure 12 - Hélio Oiticica, *Eden*, 1969



Figure 13 – Photograph of *Bed Bólide* in *Eden*

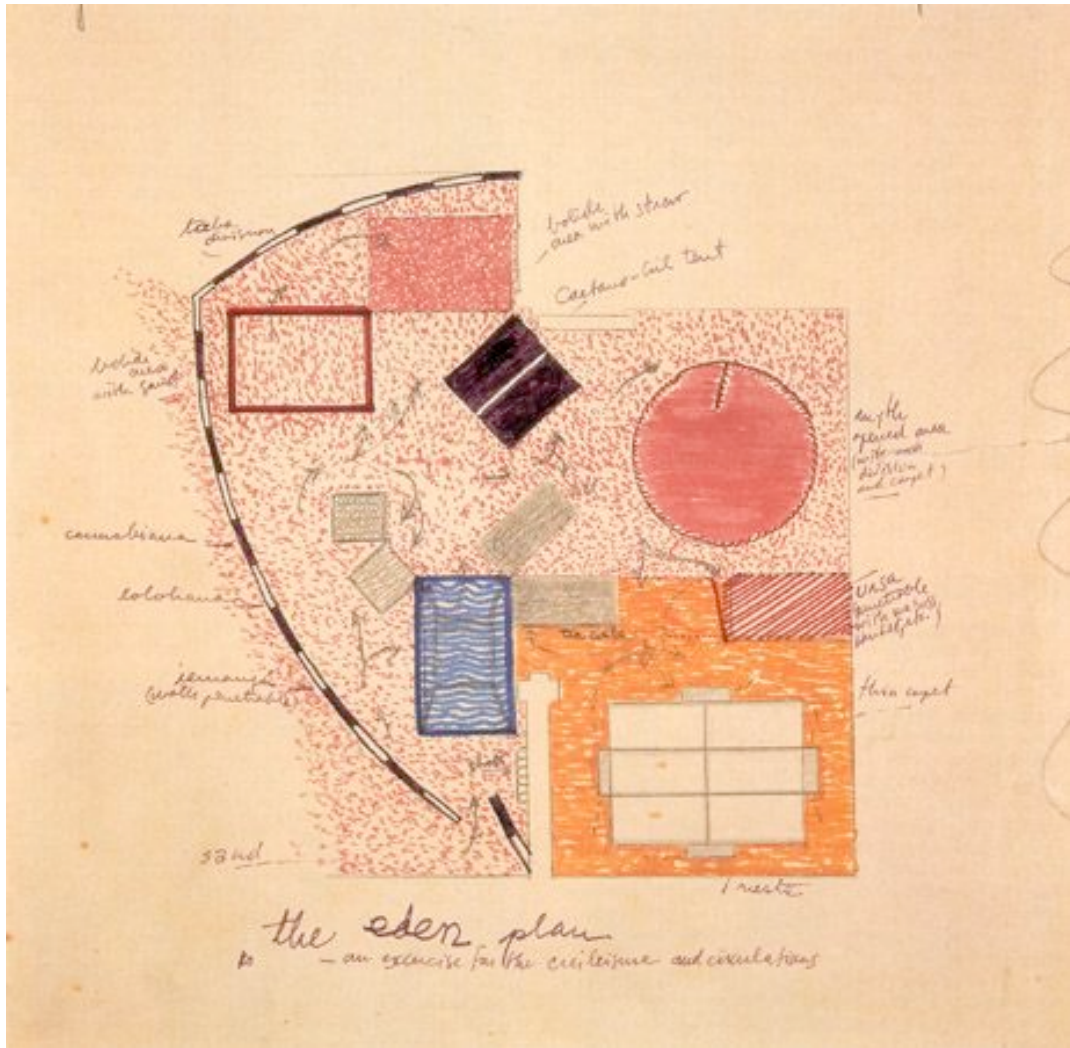


Figure 14 – Hélio Oiticica, Eden floor plan.



Figure 15 – Antonio Dias, *Do it Yourself: Freedom Territory*, 1968 (installation photograph)

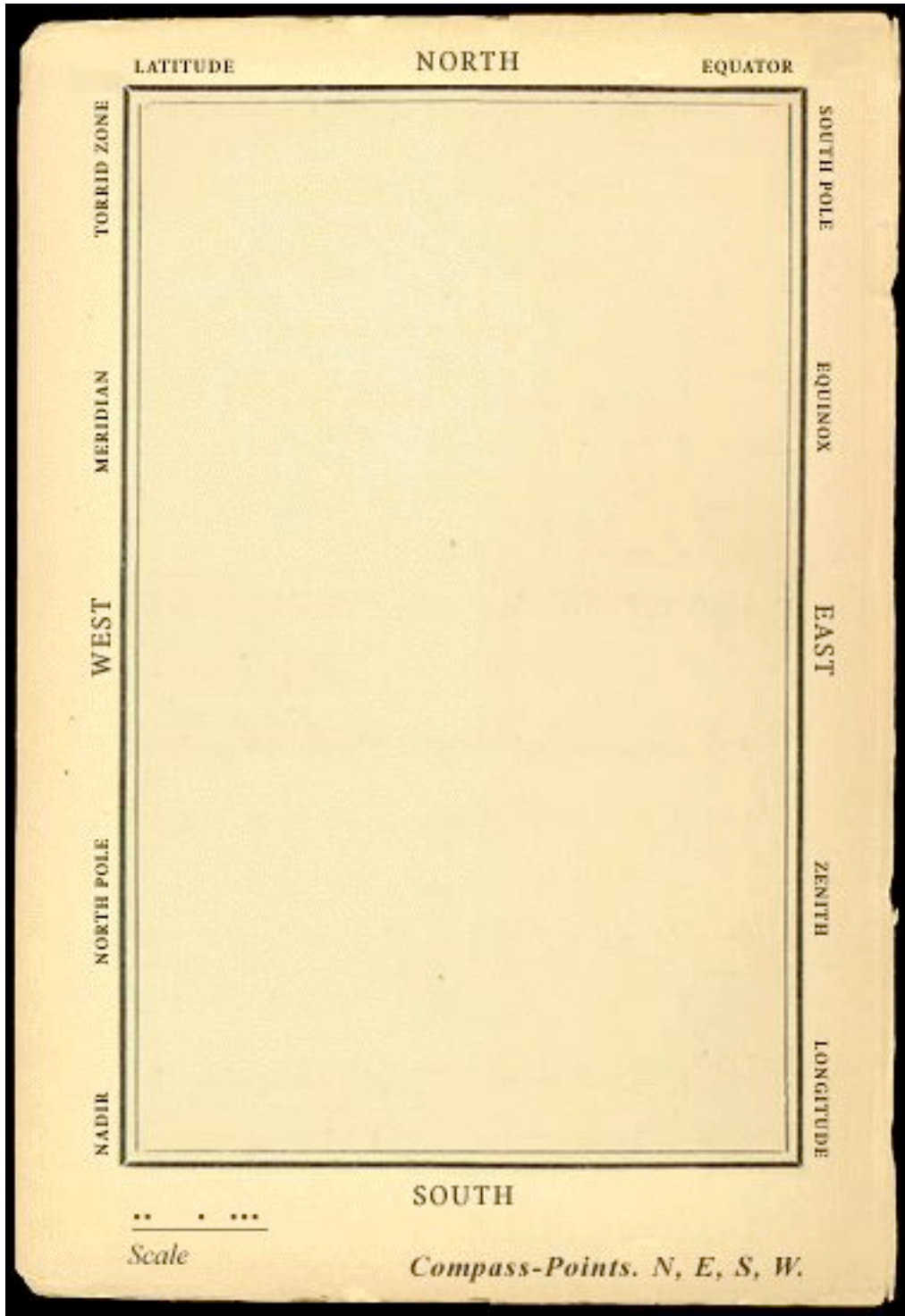


Figure 16 – Henry Holiday, Illustration from Lewis Carroll’s *The Hunting of the Snark*



Figure 17 – Photograph of *Open Area of Myth in Eden*

Bio:

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***Daniel Buren in the 1983 and 1985 São Paulo
International Biennales***

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In 1983 Daniel Buren arrives in Brazil to participate as an artist chosen by the French delegation in the seventeenth edition of the São Paulo International Biennale, a fact that would be repeated in the next Biennale. One could say that the French artist did not occupy a central place in curatorial projects in any of these events. However, one could also say that given the nature of their work, the place, so to say, peripheral, occupied by his installations in those Biennials allowed him the distance necessary for putting into practice an investigative project on the weight of the various elements - like the place of exhibition and its architecture, the curatorial practice, the kind of exposition and its public, etc - which contributes, sometimes as decisively much as implicitly, for the visibility of art works exhibited there, especially when considering this event so heavily laden with historical meaning like the São Paulo International Biennale.

Established in 1951 by the initiative of Brazilian entrepreneur Cicillo Matarazzo, having soon found acceptance in official state departments, the São Paulo Biennale, since its very beginning, has played a key role in the development of modern art in Brazil¹. In a few words, it permitted the creative contact between the production of Brazilian art and international art, as well as spreading in Brazil and throughout Latin America the productions from the European and American art context. In other words, the Biennial has sought to establish, definitively because institutionally organized, the Brazilian artistic environment showing periodically to the local public the national and international contemporary art production. Besides that, it organized a common thread based on the History of Modern Art, presenting in its exhibits the "historic cores" where there were exposed celebrated artists of the twentieth century such as Pablo Picasso and Jackson Pollock. From the first Biennial to the eighteenth edition in 1985, the main avant-garde movements of the century, both American and European, were exposed continuously - except for the Biennale of 69, boycotted in protest against the military dictatorship. In this sense, there would be no exaggeration to say that looking at the history of the Biennale is to characterize the history and state of art

¹As for this early official character of the Biennial, it is important to remember that the second edition of 1953, which began late in December, would be extended until February 1954 to coincide with the fourth centenary celebrations of the city of São Paulo. Moreover it is in this same year that the exhibition is held in Ibirapuera Park in the building commissioned by the Mayor to Oscar Niemeyer.

in Brazil, considering its advances and setbacks in its various modes and manifestations.²

The creation and development of the Biennale also should be understood as the result of some impasses inner to the modernization processes common to Latin American countries - dependence on foreign capital, accelerated industrialization, military dictatorship, globalization etc. – as well as the contemporary artistic context, marked by the collapse of the narrative of modernism and a broadening of the scope for interventions in the artistic field. However, from this rich history we detach just two chapters: the biennial of 1983, which consolidated the curatorial proposal of Walter Zanini and XVIII Bienal of 1985, known as the Biennial of the "Large Canvas" (Grande Tela) whose curator was Sheila Leirner. Both exhibits were marked by attempts to introduce in Brazil and Latin America the issue of exhaustion of the avant-garde researches - still evident in experiments such as conceptual art and minimalism. Also, trying to fulfill its historic/institutional role, both exhibitions tried to point out the directions of art for this scenario³. It is precisely at this moment that the French artist Daniel Buren presents his installations in Brazil. But before we look in close detail at the organization of the Biennial in the eighties and the participation of Daniel Buren, let's proceed to a brief historical background of this period with regard to the art world trends and its debates.

In the early 80s, there arose, with full force in the field of art, debates about the exhaustion of the avant-garde research, that concerned themes like the "end of art" and the meaning of the term "postmodernism." Themes, however, already announced, according to Fredric Jameson, at least since the mid 1960s. Nevertheless, it was, according to him, a paradoxical situation, for the vogue of the issues related to the theme of the 'end of art' co-exist during this period with the proliferation of several types of artistic events, among which there excel those tendencies that sought to recover devices employed by the avant-garde movements of the first half of the

² Cf. Francisco Alambert and Polyana Canhête. *Bienais de São Paulo*.(São Paulo: Boitempo, 2004).

³ Ricardo Nascimento Fabbrini. "Para uma história da Bienal de São Paulo: da arte moderna à contemporânea". *Revista da USP* 52(2001-2002): pp.46-55

twentieth century. On one hand artists such as the Fluxus Group, the Neodadaists, the Situationists, on the other hand, trends such as Conceptual Art, Minimal Art and Pop Art, to name a few. Symptomatically, rather than the 'end of art', we were facing some of the most fertile periods of artistic production in the twentieth century. What seemed to be at stake at that point were the would-be possibilities of Art sustaining its status, its legacy of high modernism, that is, the Art as the privileged mode of figuration of the sublime, the absolute embodiment of the truth, "... because what clearly defined modernism in the arts was mainly its unconditional statement that it has created a unique way to "apprehend and represent the absolute," which was, or wanted to be, a privileged way in which "the truth pervades the existence." ⁴ Consequently, it was also at stake the adequate mode to sort this production. As we know, modern art has not passed without a narrative that organizes its productions. A narrative, whose most important spokesman was, no doubt, the American critic Clement Greenberg, that was starting to be considered strongly biased and that gradually showed no longer to have the same organizing force. In that sense one could remember the famous words of Donald Judd, commenting on the position occupied by minimalism in art history: "It's not like a movement; anyway, movements no longer work; also, linear history has unraveled somewhat." ⁵

In turn, Peter Bürger in his influential book *'Theory of the Avant-Garde'* (1974) detects a subversive potential in artistic experiences between the world wars, which, indeed, puts the avant-garde art in a related and at the same time differentiated position within the history of modern art. The difference introduced by avant-garde, according to the German author, is better comprehended when one is aware of which he called "institution of art":

"With the concept of institution of art, I refer, Bürger writes, to both, the onset of production and distribution of art, and the dominant ideas in art at a given time that essentially determine the reception of the art works. The avant-garde is directed against both moments: the apparatus of the submission to which the art work is

⁴ Fredric Jameson, "Fim da Arte ou 'Fim da História'" in *A cultura do dinheiro*. (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2001), 83.

⁵ Donald Judd, "Objetos Específicos", in, ed. Glória Ferreira and Cecília Cotrim. *Escritos de Artistas*, (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2006), 97.

submitted and against the status of art in bourgeois society, described by the concept of autonomy." ⁶

For Bürger, the avant-garde movements were directed not only towards a self-critical reflection as was the case of modern aesthetical experience, but - and this would be its great distinction - would be attentive to the process of signification that underlies the determination of the art work as such. Ultimately, the avant-gardes opposed the autonomy that coordinates the reception of the work in bourgeois society via art as an institution. Thus, the major historical avant-garde movements in the early decades of the twentieth century bring the modernist experience to its extreme, even questioning the concept of the work of art understood as the bearer of categories such as autonomy, authorship and originality, seeking, ultimately, the end of the work of art. Therefore, the avant-gardes sought the reintegration of art with the praxis of daily life, that is, the end of art as an autonomous institution.

The will of conjugating art and life brought about by the avant-gardes is certainly dependent on some structural features of modernity. As Habermas points out, modernity as a process of social transformation would feature a gradual severance of their spheres of values, namely: science, morality and art. Each of these value spheres produces a specific knowledge increasingly specialized, moving away gradually from the world of life. The avant-gardes in their different programs would have tried alone to reach the sphere of daily life. Movements such as dada and surrealism (the 'destructive' or 'instinctual' branches of the avant-gardes) and the Neo-Plasticism or Constructivism (the so-called 'constructive' avant-gardes) and their derivation in modern architecture have tried in many ways, but equally unsuccessfully, to achieve this goal⁷. But all these "failures" were motivated by utopian/revolutionary expectations which sought to intertwine aesthetical research and the possibilities of a new life foreseen in the nearby future. That would become more rational, or better historically situated, if we remember that a historical moment as Western modernity is a moment that no longer believes that the use of past traditions and authorities

⁶ Peter Bürger, *Teoria da Vanguarda*, (Lisboa: Veja, 1993), 52.

⁷ Cf. Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity – an incomplete project", in: ed. Hal Foster, *The Anti-aesthetics: Essays on postmodern culture*, (New York: The New Press, 1998), 1-16.

substantially rooted in the past can provide the justification of present actions, that is to say, the ability to project the future becomes a decisive operation. For the modern imagination, tributary of the Enlightenment concept of history, the time can only commence from the future, since it is there that the values that have guided these experiences are or will be: the new, modern, revolutionary.

As important as this diagnosis of the role of the avant-garde in the history of modern art, with its radical critique directed against the institution nurtured by art and utopian hopes and prospects of combining art and life, is the introduction of an important term for our analysis - "Neo-avantgarde". With this term Bürger seeks to explain the artistic movements that date from the mid 50s, which recover some devices typical of the avant-garde movements of the first half of the twentieth century - the monochrome, the readymades, collages, performances, for instance. However, curiously, his analysis does not shun a hard court in relation to these experiences, linking them to the mere reproduction of expedients once critical to the institution of art but that now are harmless, indicating in this diagnosis the exhaustion of the formal experiments developed by the historical avant-gardes:

"The restoration of the art institution and the restoration of the category of work indicate that the avant-garde nowadays is history. Naturally, there are currently attempts to continue the tradition of avant-garde movements (...); such attempts, but for example the happenings - we might call neo-vanguards - can no longer reach the value of the acts of protests Dadaists, whether they can be designed and implemented with greater perfection. The reason is that the means proposed by the avant-garde has lost ever since a considerable part of its shock effect. (...). The recovery of the intentions of their own avant-garde and cutting edge means it can no longer, in a different context, reach back the limited effect of the historical vanguards. While the means by which the vanguard hopes to achieve the supersession of art received in time the status of works of art, its application can no longer be tied to a legitimate claim to a renewal of critical practice."⁸

Thus, for Bürger avant-garde art had been exhausted and absorbed by the institution against which it once turned and sought to destroy. Devoid of the utopian imagery based on the prospective temporality that marked the early decades of the twentieth century avant-garde, the sixties observe only the farcical return granted by 'neo-vanguards', that set a mere game of random signs, which, as Jameson said, would be a

⁸ Peter Bürger, *Teoria da Vanguarda*, (Lisboa: Veja, 1993), 105.

suitable way for the production and circulation of cultural products amidst the logic of late capitalism.⁹

Without abandoning this diagnosis offered by Bürger, which adds a significant critical view to aesthetic discussions, we can point to the need for a more acute historical analysis on the multiple projects covered under the term “neo-avantgardes”. It’s a measure that would allow us to avoid going back to a narrative that is based on some version of the death of art or the death of modernism or the avant-garde art. Or, to paraphrase Hal Foster, it would be important to consider that perhaps this funeral is for the wrong corpse¹⁰. This is why we agree with Foster when he makes reference to the claims of Bürger:

“This trope of tragedy followed by farce is seductive —its cynicism is a protective response to many historical ironies — but it hardly suffices as a theoretical model, let alone as historical analysis. Yet it pervades attitudes toward contemporary art and culture, where it first *constructs* the contemporary as *posthistorical*, a simulacral world of failed repetitions and pathetic pastiches, and then *condemns* it as such from a mythical point of critical escape beyond it all.”¹¹

According to the American author, the act of repetition of the creative devices, typical of the avant-gardes of the first half of the twentieth century, made by neo-vanguards deserves careful historical analysis because if, on the one hand this repetition can be used for an aesthetization of the non-aesthetic derived from the adaptation of the contemporary institutional conditions that already makes a controlled use of the "shock" or the disruptive, on the other hand, these interventions occur in a different historical time.¹² It is evident that art relates to a different society and is an institution profoundly modified in relation to the first half of the twentieth century. In this view, that considers the complexity of the matter and that critically considers the modernist expectations, this “failure” of the neo-avantgarde can point to a change of status of art within that society that goes further than a mere depreciation of it.

⁹ Fredric Jameson, *Pós-Modernismo: A lógica cultural do capitalismo tardio*, (São Paulo: Ática, 1996)

¹⁰ Hal Foster, “This funeral is for the wrong corpse”, in, ed. François Aubart et al, *Harald Szeemann Individual Methodology* (Zurich: JP Ringier, 2007), 11-20.

¹¹ Idem. *The return of the real*, (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), 14.

¹² Cf. Benjamin Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), xii-xxxiii.

During the seventies we observe therefore the emergence of a “post-utopian” avant-garde art, that is, we find the emergence of artistic practices that question the status of the art work, often using modernist strategies, but apart from the modern imagination and their guideline notions like the "new", the "revolutionary", the "Absolute" or the "Utopia"¹³. Instead of pointing this position as cynical or farsesque, we could suspect, as the work of Daniel Buren suggests, that this position does not immediately mean the end of criticism or the negative stance of art. At this moment Buren seems to be developing other forms of criticism, one could say for example a “situated critique”, in this case, a critical institutionally situated, a theme that appears frequently in his writings:

“... We consider our work as essentially critical. Critical in regard to its own process, revealing its contradictions and the situation of each of the factors taken into account and that again each time the work is presented, it is not in a predetermined order or sequence.”¹⁴

Daniel Buren's work is guided by an attempt to critically understand the privileged ways of showing an art work, since the elements/materials used in its construction, considering the architectural and institutional relationships that build the place of exhibition, determines its visual and cognitive limits.¹⁵ Consequently, the place acquired the status of a constitutive part of the work, and the work, by its turn, also intended to be a frame that makes one see the place made up of all these elements.

Throughout his career Buren developed a peculiar mode of intervention in space, succinctly spoken, it is to apply what he called his visual tool (*outil visuel*). This is understood by the artist as an effort to develop a neutral visual element (when viewed in isolation) which, given its conception, can be materialized in any area, in any size and in any location. It's a set of vertical stripes alternating white and color, which in turn are already present in the tissue that serves as a "screen" or "ground" (a “ready-made” element of the visual tool); the stripes are always 8.7 cm distant from each other, forming a series (color, white color, white). This pattern, white or colored

¹³ Ricardo Fabbrini, “O fim das Vanguardas”, *Cadernos da Pós-Graduação do Instituto de Artes UNICAMP* (2006): 111-129

¹⁴ Daniel Buren. “Limites Críticos”, in. *Textos e entrevistas escolhidos (1967-2000)*, ed. Paulo Sérgio Duarte (Rio de Janeiro: Centro de Artes Hélio Oiticica, 2001), 78.

¹⁵ Cf. Glória Ferreira, “Emprestar a paisagem – Daniel Buren e os limites críticos”, *Arte e Ensaios* 8 (2001): 85-93.

acrylic paint over a striped fabric, has been repeated for almost forty years in many different places and contexts over a wide variation of supports.

Indeed, our question here is addressed to how the work of Daniel Buren relates to the main Brazilian art institution, at the very moment that the debates over the meaning of contemporary art and the modes of framing it reach the São Paulo International Biennale.

It is in the 1981 edition, that marks the end of the international boycott and immersed in a wide climate of euphoria on the prospects for political liberalization in Brazil, that the Sao Paulo Biennale abandons its division by national pavilions and adopted as a criterion for organizing the exhibition space the analogy of medias. The abandonment of a mode of organization laid down by the Venice Biennale, Sao Paulo's inspiring model since its very beginning, may offer clues to indicate how the board in charge of the exhibition was seeking new framings to deal with structural changes in the field of art. No wonder that this moment marks the beginning of what was called "the era of the curators" to use Francisco Alambert and Polyana Canhete's words. Following them one can read that: "In 1981, we have the first representative figure of the curator at the Biennale, the critic Walter Zanini (. ..). At this first moment Zanini shared the task of selecting works with a new board elected, but soon the figure of the curator became central ... ".¹⁶

Despite this identification, in a worldwide scenario we could affirm that the figure of the curator has had increasing importance since at least the Documenta V in 1972. This year the exhibition in Kassel had been organized by Harald Szeemann, emblematic character, who personified the figure of the curator, now in charge of the "direction" of the event, responsible ultimately for its meaning. *Documenta V* devised by Harald Szeemann, and his collaborators, Johannes Cladders, Konrad Fischer and Klaus Honnef, consisted of one museum, of five very distinct sections: "Pious Imagery", "Political Propaganda", "Art of the Mentally ill", "Realism" and "Individual Mythologies". Daniel Buren, by his turn, was at *Documenta V* with the installation

¹⁶ F. Alambert and P. Canhête, op.cit. 161.

"*Exposition d'une exposition, Travail in Situ, 1972*". On this occasion he has not failed to comment on this mode of organizing the exhibition:

"It is true, therefore, that it is the exhibition that imposes itself as its own subject, and its own subject as a work of art. The exhibition is the status-enhancing receptacle in which art not only risks but damages itself because although until only recently the work was revealed by the Museum, its sole use today is as a gadget decorating the survival of the Museum as picture, a picture whose author is none other than the organizer of the exhibition itself."¹⁷

Thus, one can say that Buren already knows the peculiar traps to this mode of organization of the exhibition space and he is to be able to explore their limits. So in 1983 the XVIII edition of the Biennial, curated by Walter Zanini, he presents the installation "D'un panneaux à l'autre, d'une couleur à l'autre, À Travers la XVII Biennale. Travail in situ". This installation consisted of 25 panels with silk-screened papers displaying the visual tool, and a painting in acrylic following the same visual pattern on the escalator on the first floor of the Biennale's Pavilion. These panels were scattered across the vast exhibition space of the building in such a way that when one follows the installation, probably willing to see the whole of it, one would have to walk through all divisions and symbolic boundaries that give meaning to that event, its presence would be visible in all the sections devised by the curator. Uncomfortable presence, perhaps, for making visible the arbitrary partitioning planned beforehand to give meaning to the exhibition, which the installation itself refuses and makes evident at the same time.

Moreover, since the panels are installed on walls and columns of the building and painted all over the escalator, it also becomes difficult not to consider the influence of the architecture which informs Ciccillo Matarazzo Pavilion and the history that it makes present. No doubt that, even though ignored by the curatorial proposal, the architecture of the building helps to frame the works exhibited there. This mode of inquiry had been put by the artist clearly at least since 1976:

"The story that is yet to be told is the one about the place (architecture) in which the

¹⁷ Daniel Buren. "Exposição de uma exposição" in *Textos e entrevistas escolhidos 1967-2000*, ed. Paulo Sérgio Duarte, (Rio de Janeiro: Centro de Artes Hélio Oiticica, 2001), 81-82.

work happens (does itself) as an integral part of a whole, and all the consequences that implies the relevance of such order.

There remain therefore the questions about this place where the exhibition is held, about the context of its construction and use, and its function within the city. The Exhibition Pavilion was opened in 1957 within the Brazilian political context known as “desenvolvimentismo” marked by the industrial boom that definitively altered the course of the metropolis and, ultimately, changed the Brazilian culture as a whole. The building, at a first moment called Industrial Pavilion, was designed by the renowned Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer. The pavilion is considered one of the emblematic buildings of modern architecture in Brazil, built with steel, glass and concrete, with a ceiling height of over 7 meters, and it is located in the middle of the Ibirapuera Park, a largely wooded place chosen as a point of refuge by the middle class in Sao Paulo, amid the chaos of the megalopolis. Thus, taking into account only this data summary, it is clear that, far from a neutral receptacle, the Pavilion Ciccillo Matarazzo is an area that has resistance and that relates to the city as well as to all the works exhibited in it and to all the curatorial proposals that may be developed there.

In 1985, the eighteenth edition shows what was just indicted in the former: the issue of exhaustion of the avant-garde art and the announcement of its correlate theme, the postmodern "historicism", with the return to figuration and Expressionism, particularly by artists from German and Italian painting. This was understood as a response to the predominance of minimal and conceptual aspects that marked the previous decade. The organization of the exhibition, this time conducted by Sheila Leirner, faced with the impossibility of developing a historically organized analysis based on the modernist point of view, develops a synchronic organization whose broad theme was "Man and Life." Let's see how Leirner summarizes her proposal when facing the challenge of presenting the state of contemporary art:

"The first step regarding the organization of the 18th International Biennial of São Paulo, was to tie all these goals in a single organically intertwined and consistent proposal, so that the ponderable and imponderable, the predictable and unpredictable

never hover around them, but on the contrary integrate themselves into its principles."¹⁸

It was for the curator to show what, in her words, characterized the "Great Contemporary Art work." In this sense the proposal appropriates, somewhat uncritically, the notion of "spectacle", understood as a suitable way to expose and to frame the plethora of artworks and at the same time create a simulated space experience, expertise and understanding of contemporary art, trying to avoid making use of any kind of essentialist meta-narrative. However, the Biennial has divided its space and therefore proposed a way of understanding contemporary art. Thus, the exhibition space was divided into compartments called "nave" and "lateral naves" or "transepts" (nomenclature borrowed from the cathedral buildings). At the heart of the show was the famous "Large Canvas", which consisted of an area divided into three aisles 6 meters wide, 5 tall and 100 long, where there were placed next to each other dozens of large paintings by artists from different parts of the world, whose only requirement seemed to be "Show yourself."

In the midst of this organization, which revealed almost didactically the curator's power over the exhibition space, which was not without controversy among critics and artists, Daniel Buren presents the installation "A Room in A Room." The installation aims to create exactly what the name says: a room (or chapel?) placed inside one of the "transepts", that is, build a room in one of the other rooms proposed by the show. The structure of the work is derived from the "*cabanes éclatées*" or "exploded huts", a mode of intervention developed by the artist during the eighties, more precisely in 1984, when Buren started to use this structural model of situated work and not just the work *in situ*, what is to say, no longer derived directly from the place of its installation.

The "exploded hut" is literally an effort to build a hut, using a parallelepiped-shaped volume, which has a lightweight structure, the vertical partitions being made out of striped fabric with the visual tool stretched over frames, the ensemble top by a canopy, structured by unpainted wood. Its construction is symmetric; the space of the

¹⁸ Sheila Leirner. *Bienal de Internacional de São Paulo, Catálogo Geral* (Fundação Bienal: São Paulo, 1985), 15.

"wall" is divided into squares of equal measures framed by wood-shaped grid that serves as a frame for the walls, and all these squares, whose area can be seen as the space of a canvas, is decorated with fabric displaying the visual tool. Surfaces are cut out of the vertical partitions ("walls") and projected onto walls parallel to them as if there had happen an explosion inside it.

No wonder that at the time Buren's Installation was understood as:

"... The presence of the geometrical past (...): iconodule dismantling of the squaring of the perfect square (...) was interpreted as a deconstruction of geometric art, understood as a critique of the avant-garde, in which the artist adheres to the constructive position criticized - the constructive artist - and then unfolding it in the present, in new artistic effectuations." ¹⁹

Undoubtedly the work of Buren can not be conceived without considering the relationship with the avant-garde art from the first half of the twentieth century, but his position goes beyond an immanent critique of art history or a deconstructive operation only. In this case the complete functionality of the installation is also linked to the context of its appearance and the spatial (the very architecture of the exhibition place) and symbolical elements (the influence of the framework proposed by the curator) that surround it.

Let's try to sum up and contextualize this functionality:

"While the hut itself is perceived as a sculpture, the cut-outs projected on the walls look more like paintings. And since the shapes cut out of the hut create "skylights" and "doors" in each of its surfaces, the visitor, once he goes inside, has differently framed views of the space outside"²⁰

That is, we access the rest of the exhibition space from the point of view proposed by the installation. Inevitably a circuit of visibility is activated, driven primarily by the shapes of the cuts on the hut's walls through which we access the other works on display in that same room of the exhibition. However, this same room now appears modified not only by the point of view offered by the hut but also by the cut-outs

¹⁹ Ricardo Fabbrini, "Para uma história da Bienal de São Paulo: da arte moderna à contemporânea", *Revista da USP* 52 (2001-2002), 51.

²⁰ Guy Lelong, *Daniel Buren*. (Flamarion, 2001), 80.

installed on the walls parallel to it. The "ruins of the explosion" in turn, are made of the same material and follow the same pattern visually observed on the inner side of the facility, i.e., the pattern of the visual tool.

Thus, it is evident that the installation and the space where it is located are inseparable. Far from a mere interference it's the set of a reciprocal relationship, it's a room within a room, the two parts of the apparently tautological definition now make evident their reciprocity. But it's not a pacific reciprocity either, rather this means that one is unable to adopt a neutral point of view or try to establish a homogeneous standpoint in the curatorial space. With this installation, Buren, therefore, highlights the properties of a conditional, partial, full of cross-interference visibility, a non-spectacular vision, we could risk. Thus, the installation of Buren achieves a paradoxical role inside the space idealized by the Biennale's curator, because when entering the exhibition space it has a function, that is, to make visible the limits of curatorial proposal itself and, ultimately, its own impossibility.

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***Creleisure* as Critique? Reading Oiticica with Marcuse and Marighela**

Hélio Oiticica's concept of *creleisure* was created by the artist while preparing the *Eden* project for his 1969 exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in London: "The idea of *creleisure* (*crelazer* in Portuguese) arises slowly with the *Eden* concept, in fact it is its profound sense."ⁱ The *Eden* project, and the concept of *creleisure* which framed it, marked a turn in Oiticica's artistic practice. This shift was clearly registered in the works that the artist made in New York after the Whitechapel show during his extended residency in the city from 1970–1978: the *Babylonnests* and *Hendrixnests*; the *Subterranean Tropicália Projects*; and the *Quasi Cinemas*. These series of works developed the concept of *creleisure* that Oiticica had invented in London. Given that these late, New York works remain relatively under-discussed it is important to elaborate Oiticica's concept of *creleisure* and account for its significance within the development of his practice.

Creleisure was a neologism that combined the senses of creativity, faith, leisure and pleasure. The artist described the concept in an allusive way: "Is *Creleisure* creation of leisure or belief in leisure? I don't know, maybe both, maybe neither. The dumbos can quit at this point, because they will never understand: it is stupidity which predominates in art criticism... luckily they were punished by their own indifference to pleasure, to leisure..."ⁱⁱ How then to understand *creleisure* in its own spirit, avoiding the habitual, anhedonic "stupidity" that Oiticica detected in most art criticism? Counter-intuitively, it is necessary to take Oiticica's playful concept

intensely seriously in order to understand and evaluate it. Doing otherwise would be to betray the political import Oiticica attached to *creleisure*.

Oiticica's concept of *creleisure* should be understood against the backdrop of the recuperation of the critical energies of the Tropicalist movement in Brazil and, more significantly, in light of the climate of increasingly repressive rule by the Brazilian military dictatorship after 1968. This period of Oiticica's practice can be understood as *exilic* (albeit an exile that was undertaken of his own volition).ⁱⁱⁱ As Oiticica prepared to leave Brazil in 1970 he wrote "Brazil Diarrhea," a scathing, scatological indictment of the artistic conditions prevailing in the country under the dictatorship: "Cultural-institution policing is cultivated in Brazil today."^{iv} Oiticica only returned to Brazil after the climate of repression had decisively moderated.^v

Nevertheless, throughout "Brazil Diarrhea" Oiticica remained committed to the necessity and possibility of Brazilian culture, albeit a Brazilian culture reframed in universal, rather than national, terms.^{vi} Pondering whether his critical stance would constitute merely the "aspirin" or "the cure," Oiticica nevertheless affirmed the necessity of an "experimental" and a "permanently critical and universal position," insisting that anything else was merely "dilution of the diarrhea."^{vii} In New York, Oiticica advanced an explicitly *revolutionary* project: "I affirm: conscious omission, or better, jumping ship, can be more important to revolutionary 'Brazilian culture' than participation in the 'policed' immediate context..."^{viii}

At the heart of Oiticica's concept of *creleisure* is an aesthetic problem handed down from Schiller, namely the critical, and indeed revolutionary, potential of aesthetic

sensuousness and play. Oiticica read deeply in the continental philosophical tradition from an early age and philosophical aesthetics informed his artistic practice from the beginning.^{ix} However, the “hedonic” character of the works that Oiticica elaborated under the concept of *creleisure* seems to stand in stark contrast to the “ascetic” character that Adorno insisted was indispensable to autonomous art since modernism. Given the new, hedonic spirit of capitalism that has developed after the failure of the cultural revolution of the late Sixties (recuperating its demands for individual autonomy and self-expression) does Oiticica’s concept of *creleisure* still look to have held critical promise?

Answering such a question necessarily involves developing a fuller understanding of Oiticica’s concept and it is to this preliminary task that I address myself here. I will argue that *creleisure* can be illuminated by way of comparison to the contemporaneous theoretical work of Herbert Marcuse and Carlos Marighela. Here then we will follow just a couple of threads through the profoundly labyrinthine intellectual schema of Oiticica’s work. In so doing, however, we aim to begin to draw out the “profound sense” of *creleisure*.

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Oiticica made it clear that there was a utopian core to his concept of *creleisure*: “creleisure may be marginalized now, but I am sure there will be a day when it won’t be, as far as human aspirations become disalienated in an oppressive world, not as a desublimative and fake activity, but as a real one, demystifying and transforming it internally.” In formulating *creleisure* then, Oiticica directly echoed concepts that were developed in Marcuse’s work (“desublimation”; “disalienation”), appropriating them as materials for his own creative use.^x While there are no copies of any works by Marcuse in Oiticica’s extant library (held by the Projeto Hélio Oiticica) there is nevertheless clear evidence from Oiticica’s correspondence with Lygia Clark that the artist not only read and admired Marcuse’s work, but even sought to articulate his concepts in relation to Marcuse’s: “Now, reading *Eros and Civilization* by Marcuse, I see that he was right (in fact you should read it since it has so much to do with your thinking – in the beginning one is left somewhat disconcerted, but it is good)...”; “For Marcuse, artists, philosophers... ‘act marginally’ since they do not have a specific social class... When I say ‘marginal position’ I mean something similar to the Marcusean concept...”^{xi}

It is, however, Oiticica’s interest in Marcuse’s *An Essay on Liberation* (1969) that will prove of most significance for my argument here: “I found out that in the most recent book that he wrote [*An Essay on Liberation*] Marcuse has a chapter in which he proposes a ‘biological foundation for socialism’ as un-repressive... the same as I have been thinking.”^{xii} The concept of an *aesthetic ethos* that Marcuse develops in *An Essay on Liberation* closely relates to Oiticica’s development of the concept of *creleisure* in his New York works. However, as we will see, the differences between

Marcuse's and Oiticica's positions ultimately prove more significant than the similarities.

Marcuse was, following Habermas' characterisation, habitually "the most affirmative amongst those who praised negativity," and exposure to the seditious energy of the counter cultures led him to develop, albeit cautiously, a more optimistic account of the prospects for artistic resistance to the totalitarian development of technocratic society.^{xiii} Consequently, Marcuse modified the argument he had advanced in *One Dimensional Man* (1964) in a later companion article "Art in the One Dimensional Society" (1967). Here Marcuse broke the conventional Marxian ban on utopian speculation and focused on extrapolating the liberatory potential of art, developing a dialectical alternative to his earlier hypothesis concerning art's "repressive desublimation," namely the thesis that art might enact a liberating sublimation of technique (and technique a liberating sublimation of art) thereby constructing a new rationality for a new society. In an *Essay on Liberation* Marcuse presented this vision in greater detail:

The liberated consciousness would promote the development of a science and technology free to discover and realize the possibilities of things and men in the protection and gratification of life, playing with the potentialities of form and matter for the attainment of this goal. Technique would then tend to become art, and art would tend to form reality: the opposition between imagination and reason, higher and lower faculties, poetic and scientific thought would be invalidated. Emergence of a new Reality Principle: under which a new sensibility and a desublimated scientific intelligence would combine in the creation of an *aesthetic ethos*.^{xiv}

Marcuse initially understood the radical challenge represented by the New Art of the 1960s to be consonant with his notion of an *aesthetic ethos*, observing, retrospectively, in "Art as a Form of Reality" (1970), that: "The development of Art

to nonobjective art, minimal art, antiart was a way toward the liberation of the subject, preparing it for a new object-world instead of accepting and sublimating, beautifying the existing one, freeing mind and body for a new sensibility and sensitivity which can no longer tolerate a mutilated experience and a mutilated sensibility.”^{xv} Here then Marcuse’s thought appears similar to Oiticica’s proposition to make life aesthetic by proposing art as a form of reality.

Yet, for Marcuse, the aesthetic could “migrate” from art into life only under revolutionary social conditions. Given the post-68 failure of the revolutionary social process and in the face of counter-revolution, Marcuse subsequently came to insist that only traditional *aesthetic* art held open the promise of freedom in an unfree society. Consequently, in “Art as a Form of Reality” he also criticised the New Art, glossing its antiformalism as ultimately resulting only in the degradation of art: “Incapable of bridging the gap between Art and reality, of escaping from the fetters of the Art-Form, the rebellion against “form” only succeeds in a loss of artistic quality: illusory destruction, illusory overcoming of alienation.”^{xvi} By 1972, in his article “Art and Revolution,” a work which summarised many of the themes he developed in *Counter-Revolution and Revolt* (1972), Marcuse insisted on the necessity of “the *passing* of antiart and the *re-emergence* of form.”^{xvii}

Marcuse was nevertheless obliged to record the fact that art’s traditionally “aesthetic” character had been sacrificed by the historical avant-garde’s from which the new art of the 1960s derived much of their inspiration. The “free society” had thus been prefigured anti-aesthetically. Ultimately, however, Marcuse would not go beyond a traditional attachment to art as aesthetic art, with the result that anti-art could only be understood

in concert with a revolutionary social process, as a *temporary* means by which the sublation of art into life might be effected in order to achieve a long-term aestheticisation of reality.

Where Oiticica and Marcuse's thought cannot obviously be reconciled then is in their respective views on the possibility and desirability of anti-art. For Marcuse the counter-cultural moment of anti-art was only thinkable as part of a broader revolutionary process which would supersede art as a category. In contrast, Oiticica insisted on aesthetic anti-art as a *permanent* necessity, even, and perhaps especially, after the failure of a social revolution. Describing the *Subterranean Tropicália Projects*, Oiticica summarised the entire trajectory of his practice:

All my work... has been a development of the disintegration of formal concepts (starting with that of 'painting' itself) of art, and looking for a form of non-contemplative contact; the participation of the spectator (and participator) touching, dressing, penetrating the actual pieces, developed towards actual propositions... something similar to practices of the spontaneous self, non-ritualistic, as an actual *anti-art permanent position*; the denial of the artist as a creator of objects, but turned into the proposer of practices...^{xviii}

As Marcuse became increasingly demoralised by the post-68 counter-revolutionary reaction to the cultural revolution he became correspondingly disillusioned with the creative forms that had been associated with the counterculture and gave up his speculations about the possible realisation of an aesthetic ethos. His aesthetics became increasingly "classical," insisting that art was not thinkable except in relation to its traditional aesthetic forms. Marcuse could not conceive of anti-art as a new aesthetic form, and thus could not have agreed with Oiticica's insistence on the need for a "permanent anti-art position." For Marcuse, anti art was self-defeating because "it remains, and must retain, no matter how 'minimally' the Form of Art as different

from nonart, and it is the Art-Form itself which frustrates the intention to reduce or even annul this difference, to make art ‘real,’ ‘living.’”^{xix}

Oiticica’s temporal extension of anti-art as a “permanent position” might indeed seem to obviate its negating force. Yet what Marcuse could not see was that new forms of art might be elaborated beyond the traditional aesthetic forms of painting and sculpture. The question Oiticica’s work posed here was thus the opposite of conceptual art’s: *creleisure* proposed an aesthetically *expanded* form of anti-art (as art) rather than the aesthetically *reduced* form of anti-art (as art).

The challenge for Oiticica’s concept of *creleisure* was that advanced industrial capitalism was also undertaking the aestheticisation of everyday life. This was a risk that Marcuse had recognised in relation to his own proposal for art as a form of reality: “‘Art as Form of Reality’ means not the beautification of the given but the construction of an entirely different and opposed reality. The aesthetic vision is part of the revolution.”^{xx} In Oiticica’s concept of *creleisure* we can however recognise a profound attempt to go beyond the problem at the heart of Marcuse’s aesthetic traditionalism, namely the fact that the “aesthetic vision” was held to be “part of the revolution” but that without the revolution, no aesthetic revolution could be conceived. As Marcuse put it: “To the degree to which it makes itself part of real life, it loses the transcendence which opposes art to the established order—it remains *immanent* in this order, one-dimensional, and thus succumbs to this order. Precisely its immediate “life quality” is the undoing of this anti-art, and of its appeal.”^{xxi}

Oiticica had always insisted that *creleisure* was able to transcend the repressive social context, formulating his concept against the alienated forms of mainstream leisure. In order to clarify the political character of Oiticica's concept of *creleisure* we need to shift our focus away from Oiticica's engagement with Marcuse and towards his relationship to the work of Carlos Marighela.

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Oiticica's concept of *creleisure* was developed at the same time as Carlos Marighela's short-lived revolutionary insurgency against the Brazilian military dictatorship. Combat was begun by Marighela in 1968 but he was shot dead by the police in an ambush on November 4, 1969, precipitating the end of the armed struggle in Brazil. Revolutionary war in Brazil thus lasted less than two years. The success of Marighela's revolutionary strategy might therefore be compared unfavourably with that developed by Raúl Sendic and the Tupamaro movement in Uruguay.^{xxii} Both Marighela and Sendic, learning from the failure of Guevara in Bolivia, had reformulated revolutionary guerrilla strategy, moving away from Guevara's emphasis on the necessity of beginning with a rural theatre of operation (eventually to encircle and take the cities) and instead emphasising the necessity of beginning with an urban theatre (building forces in the cities before seeking to take the countryside). Of principle interest here is the fact that Sendic and the Tupamaros *combined* a strategy of cultural and armed resistance within the urban guerrilla *foco* whereas Marighela, in contrast, gave the armed struggle primacy at the expense of the cultural: "Violence

against violence. The only solution is what we are doing now: using violence against those who used it first to attack the people and the nation.”^{xxiii}

Here we can profitably consult Régis Debray’s analysis of the reasons for the failure of the Latin American Revolutionary movements. Reflecting on the flaws in his own earlier *Revolution in the Revolution?* in *A Critique of Arms*, Debray noted the relative ease of starting a guerrilla war compared to the real difficulty of successfully concluding one. Debray analysed the problem as attributable in large part to the challenge of developing and holding rearguard bases.^{xxiv} Developing his autocritique Debray concluded: “a rear base can only fulfil its logistical function if it is first and foremost a political base, a social base, and even indeed a *cultural base*.”^{xxv}

Oiticica’s experiments in *creleisure* can be understood in light of the failure of a “pure-play” armed guerrilla strategy in Brazil and as an attempt at developing a *cultural base* for revolution. On such an account, Oiticica’s concept of *creleisure* sought to resolve the problem of how to achieve an aesthetic revolution without a parallel social revolution —the problem that Marcuse had found irresolvable—by holding to the foundational Guevaran insight that: “One does not necessarily have to wait for a revolutionary situation to arise; it can be created.”^{xxvi} Oiticica’s concept of *creleisure* proposed a revolution in the concept of *aesthetic* revolution on the model of a “cultural” *foco*. In this sense the Oiticican approach contradicts Fredric Jameson’s general observation that “For all practical purposes, this powerful [*foco*] model” was “exhausted, even before Che’s own tragic death in Bolivia in 1967, with the failure of the guerrilla movements in Peru and Venezuela in 1966.”^{xxvii}

We can think of the *Babylonests* and *Hendrixests* that Oiticica developed in his New York lofts (as extensions of the *Nests* he had experimented with at the Whitechapel, during his residency at Sussex University and in the “Information” exhibition at MoMA), as well as the more elaborate environmental schemes that constitute the *Subterranean Tropicália Projects*, as provisional experiments in developing cultural revolutionary *focos*.

Such a radical interpretation of Oiticica’s concept of *creleisure* can be supported by consulting both primary and secondary sources.^{xxviii} In his study of the emergence and growth of a Brazilian counterculture, Christopher Dunn observes that “Caetano Veloso has claimed that the tropicalists secretly admired Marighela and other guerrilla leaders.”^{xxix} Nevertheless Dunn also records that “left-wing artists constituted less than one percent of the guerrilla movement.”^{xxx} Dunn thus confirms that Brazilian avant-garde artists supported the objectives of the revolutionary guerrilla war waged by Marighela but did not involve themselves directly in armed combat in any significant numbers. Here then we can see that the Brazilian revolutionary insurgency, contra the strategy pursued in Uruguay, was fought on two distinct fronts, the armed and the cultural. As we have seen in “Brazil Diarrhea” Oiticica understood that the war against repression in Brazil could be fought in an international context and that “jumping ship” temporarily provided a more effective strategy than remaining within a repressively policed context in which his ability to develop his practice and show his work was severely curtailed.

Certainly then the fight could be taken to New York, the capital of a nation directly backing repression across Latin America. Oiticica clearly deplored what he took to be

the reactionary tenor of (the vast majority of) the New York art world: “I don’t know what is going on here, but there is such a bourgeois art scene, conformity and reactionarism going on, unbelievable.”^{xxxix} He also expressed his frustration with the pseudo-radicalism of the time “I am just fed up with revolutionary things being said in academic ways,” exclaiming “how can I take any pseudo-revolutionary orthodox bullshit?”^{xxxix} With the exception of his participation in “Information,” Oiticica spent most of his time in New York avoiding the mainstream and developing his projects in a self-consciously “subterranean” manner (“of course I did not go to guggenheim annual, or whitney annual, etc.”).^{xxxix} Most significantly, Oiticica located his own artistic concerns in light of post-Guevaran revolutionary strategy and tactics, explicitly recommending them as models to be emulated: “they [New York artists] should... learn about real guerrilla warfare... not even Guevara’s lessons have been absorbed.”^{xxxix} In contrast, Oiticica had clearly learned from Guevara’s example, even dedicating a *parangolé* to him, *Guevarcália: in memoriam Guevara* (1968).

That the radical character of Oiticica’s concept of *creleisure* has not been more widely recognised is partly a consequence of the fact that his most important theoretical exposition of the concept failed to appear in the public realm. Following his experience of showing at the Whitechapel, Oiticica prepared a text expressing his antipathy to mainstream art institutions and the society that they reflected. Oiticica had hoped to publish this text, entitled “The Senses Pointing to a New Transformation” (1969), in *Studio International*. Yet despite having been directly commissioned by the editor of the magazine and submitted to him, the text was never published. As a result, Oiticica’s argument was denied the international audience and high-level exposure he legitimately believed it deserved.^{xxxv} Oiticica published an

abbreviation of these ideas in his contribution to the “Information” catalogue but the text was radically truncated and its message easily lost amongst numerous other contributions. In “The Senses Pointing to a New Transformation” the artist clearly outlined his revolutionary ambitions:

Recently, a new demand and important decisions came to me: in the experience I propose, such as the practice of *creleisure*. The impossibility of “exhibiting” objects as part of this idea, in galleries or museums, has become evident: I have had a definite glimpse of that with the Whitechapel experiment in February-April 1969, in London.... But all the evolution I presented there leads into this condition: the impossibility of experiments in galleries or museums... The exhibition room refers always to an old idea of “displaying objects,” to an “objectal representation;” so why insist on the old forms when a new experimental world demands, and with urgency, complete new ways of communication. We are in the beginning of a new language, a new world of experience in communication and *proposing a complete revolution towards an individual-social uprising*.^{xxxvi}

Oiticica also provided his strongest exposition of *creleisure* in this text: “For me the classical leisure-alienation conflict generating the alienated leisure ideas as represented in the modern western world, would be attacked as a direct consequence of this absorption of art-processes into life-processes. Creleisure is the non-repressive leisure, opposed to diverted oppressive leisure thinking: a new unconditioned way *to battle oppressive systematic ways of life*.”^{xxxvii} The artist also explained that, just as in revolutionary foco strategy, the individual cells or “nests” of *creleisure* were to multiply and propagate themselves, until the point at which the existing regime could be overthrown: “The idea of community cells or of experimental communities came to me side by side with that of wide-spread collectivities, such as the building of collective sites or abiding places: in the first ones, the creleisure private group-cells would be evolved in a plan I have had in mind for a long time: the Barracão; after that the idea of environment would be the creation of real architectures and gardens, invented sites which could have a new sense, away from “integrative”

experiences...^{xxxviii} Given the failure of the (armed) revolution in the concept of revolution attempted in Latin America by Guevara, Marighela, Sendic and others, Oiticica instead attempted to generate an alternative by revolutionising the Schillerian concept of aesthetic revolution.

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Schiller originally formulated the idea of revolution by means of aesthetic education (aesthetic revolution) in order to overcome the shortcomings of the purely rational conception of revolution, shortcomings that were undeniable as soon as the French Revolution had degenerated into the Terror. As Jacques Rancière has appositely summarised Schiller's thought: "the revolution of producers" was "conceivable only after a revolution within the very idea of revolution, in the idea of a revolution of the forms of sensible existence as opposed to a revolution of state forms."^{xxxix} Schiller concludes *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* by speculating on the hypothetical terminus of aesthetic revolution in the creation of an *aesthetic State*.

Yet Schiller was famously unsure whether such an aesthetic State had ever been, or could ever be, realised: "But does such a State of Aesthetic Semblance really exist? And if so, where is it to be found?" Schiller's unsatisfying conclusion was to posit that it could occur only "in some few chosen circles," a social milieu "where conduct is governed, not by soulless imitation of the manners and morals of others, but by the aesthetic nature we have made our own."^{xl} The problem here, and the reason why

Schiller's conclusion is so unsatisfying, is that the obstacles to generalising aesthetic education under actually existing conditions of repression are manifest.

The "failure" of the cultural revolution of the late 1960s seemed to recapitulate the canonical Schillerian impasse and led Marcuse to reassert that only traditional aesthetic art offered the promise of freedom in a repressive world. Oiticica however refused the terms of this dilemma, seeking to effect a revolution in the aesthetic revolution on the model of the urban *foco* strategy that had been developed in Latin America by Marighela to revolutionise the traditional concept of armed revolution. Here then I hope to have identified the gravity of the stakes at play in Oiticica's concept of *creleisure*. Assessing the historical effectiveness and the contemporary legacy of this Oiticican alternative presents itself as our next urgent task.

ⁱ Reproduced in Guy Brett and Luciano Figueiredo, eds., *Oiticica in London* (London: Tate Publishing, 2007), unpaginated. Catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition “Oiticica in London” shown at the Tate Modern, London.

ⁱⁱ Oiticica, “Creleisure,” in *Hélio Oiticica* (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 2002), 132. Catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition “Hélio Oiticica” shown at Witte de With, Rotterdam 1992.

ⁱⁱⁱ Oiticica, along with many other Brazilian artists, left the country as the military dictatorship became increasingly repressive. Most artists were not, however, formally exiled (although notable exceptions to this general rule included the celebrated Tropicalist musicians Caetano Veloso and Chico Buarque).

^{iv} Oiticica, “Brazil Diarrhea,” in *Hélio Oiticica*, 17.

^v The military regime would pass an amnesty bill for political exiles in 1979.

^{vi} “No-one ‘loves Brazil’ more than I...”; “The urgency to create (establish a position), within a universal context for this Brazil language, is the wish to locate a problem which, were it merely local, would estrange... the ‘urgency’ of this ‘placing of values’ in a universal context is what should really preoccupy those who search for a ‘way out of the Brazilian problem.’” Oiticica, “Brazil Diarrhea,” 19; 17–18.

^{vii} *Ibid.*, 17; 20.

^{viii} *Ibid.*, 20.

^{ix} In 1954 “Hélio... began to study painting with Ivan Serpa at the Museu de Arte Moderna (MAM) in Rio. Hélio began to read extensively on anarchism and also the works of Kant, Heidegger, Sartre and Nietzsche, philosophers quoted frequently in his later texts.” “Chronology,” in *Hélio Oiticica*, 210.

^x To the best of my knowledge Oiticica’s link to Marcuse has not been discussed in the critical literature on the artist published in English or Portuguese. The only other scholar I have come across who has remarked on this relationship is Aléxia Bretas who presented a paper entitled “Sobre a proposta de um ethos estético não-repressivo: ressonâncias marcusianas em Lygia Clark e Hélio Oiticica” at the *Congresso Internacional Estéticas do Deslocamento* in Belo Horizonte in 2007. I discovered Bretas’ paper after drafting my own. I have consulted a copy of Bretas’ paper in rough translation and while her work touches on Oiticica’s relationship to Schiller and Marcuse she does not comment on the affinities between Marcuse’s concept of *aesthetic ethos* and Oiticica’s concept of *creleisure* that inform my treatment here.

^{xi} Hélio Oiticica, Letter to Lygia Clark, 15th October, 1968; Hélio Oiticica, Letter to Lygia Clark, 8th November, 1968. Translations by Susana Caló.

^{xii} Hélio Oiticica, Letter to Lygia Clark, 27th June, 1969. Translation by Susana Caló.

^{xiii} Jürgen Habermas, “Psychic Thermidor and the Rebirth of Rebellious Subjectivity,” in *Marcuse: Critical Theory and the Promise of Utopia*, ed. Robert Pippin, Andrew Feenberg and Charles P. Webel (London: Macmillan, 1988), 3–12, 3.

^{xiv} Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 24.

^{xv} Marcuse, “Art as a Form of Reality,” in *On the Future of Art*, ed. Edward Fry (New York: Viking Press, 1970), 123–134, 130.

^{xvi} *Ibid.*, 131.

^{xvii} Herbert Marcuse, “Art and Revolution,” in *Art and Liberation: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, Vol. IV*, ed. Douglas Kellner (London: Routledge, 2007), 166–177, 170.

^{xviii} Hélio Oiticica, “Subterranean Tropicália Projects” in *Hélio Oiticica*, 143–144, 143. My emphasis.

^{xix} Marcuse, “Art as a Form of Reality,” 131.

^{xx} *Ibid.*, 133.

^{xxi} Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 101.

^{xxii} For a comparison of this sort, see Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 46–49. For a thorough assessment of Tupamaro strategy, see Arturo C. Porzecanski, *Uruguay’s Tupamaros: The Urban Guerrilla* (New York: Praeger, 1973).

^{xxiii} Carlos Marighela, *For the Liberation of Brazil*, trans. John Butt (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 21.

^{xxiv} “‘The rear’ has come to be seen during the past ten years as the strategic problem above all others in the development of the armed struggle in town and country.” Régis Debray, *A Critique of Arms*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 115.

^{xxv} Ibid., 123.

^{xxvi} Che Guevara, “General Principles of Guerrilla Fighting,” in Mao-Tse-Tung and Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* (London: Cassell, 1962), 111-115, 111.

^{xxvii} Fredric Jameson, “Periodizing the 60s,” *Social Text*, no.9/10 (Spring/Summer 1984), 178–209, 203.

^{xxviii} I have not found any direct reference to Oiticica’s concept of *creleisure* along the lines I articulate here in the existing scholarship on the artist.

^{xxix} Christopher Dunn, *Brutality Garden: Tropicália and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 113.

^{xxx} Dunn, *Brutality Garden*, 112. Dunn cites Marcelo Ridenti, *O fantasma da revolução brasileira* (São Paulo: Editora da Universidade Estadual de São Paulo, 1994), 76.

^{xxxi} Letter to Guy Brett, March 6 1971. I have left Oiticica’s English in its original form. Oiticica did find some work to admire in New York, particularly Jack Smith’s films. Sincere thanks to Guy Brett for sharing this letter with me.

^{xxxii} Ibid.

^{xxxiii} Ibid.

^{xxxiv} Ibid.

^{xxxv} I am indebted to Paula Braga’s “Conceptualism and Life-Experience” for drawing my attention to this text and the controversy surrounding it. See, Paula Braga, “Conceptualism and Life-Experience,” in *Fios Soltos: A arte de Hélio Oiticica*, ed. Paula Braga (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2008), 277–287.

^{xxxvi} Hélio Oiticica, “The Senses Pointing to a New Transformation” (1969), unpublished. The text can be found at <http://www.itaucultural.org.br/aplicExternas/enciclopedia/ho/home/index.cfm>.

^{xxxvii} Ibid. My emphasis.

^{xxxviii} Ibid.

^{xxxix} Rancière, “Aesthetics as Politics,” in Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 33–34.

^{xl} Ibid., 219.

Abstract

The goal of this paper is to describe and interrogate the use “conceptualism” in Latin American art historiography. The challenge posed by the exhibition *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* in 1999, in its intention to expand the term chronologically and geographically, and to inscribe it in a revised genealogy of post-war artistic practices, is taken as a point of departure. This reconsideration has been especially significant, as confirmed by the number of debates surrounding the topic and also by its rapid assimilation from a new generation of critics, curators and historians that have taken the name on board, but also question some of its ideological effects. In order to address these debates the paper proposes the use of the derridean concept of supplement. The new expanded consideration of conceptualism opens new possibilities to re-write the diverse ways in which avant-garde was updated and re-activated in different parts of the world. This paper calls for a reconsideration of the neo-avantgarde debate in the Latin American context, in order to cast a new light onto a extensive historiographic blind spot. It also aims to explore the aftermaths of the prevailing categorization of Latin American conceptualism as ideological, or as the paper suggests, critical conceptualism, used as signifier of difference. If Latin American conceptualism is different, is difference a consequence of the practice or of the categorisation to which it is submitted?

Uses of Conceptualism in Latin American Art Historiography

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The goal of this paper is to interrogate the role played in the historiography of Latin American art by the category conceptualism. In the last decades two re-elaborations of the concept have entered the historiographic debate, aiming to describe and to inscribe certain artistic practices since the 1960s in a different genealogy. In 1993, M^a Carmen Ramírez put forward the term “ideological conceptualism” in order to indicate the specificities of Latin American conceptual art. At the end of 2007 a network of researchers was founded under the name Red de Conceptualismos del Sur, whose aim is to question some of the effects of the use of “ideological conceptualism”¹. Each of them epitomise two different deconstructive models (derridean supplement and Torres-García’s “inverted map”²) that I will examine in the paper. The coincidental points of debate of both projects are how to make visible and legible Latin American artistic practices, that were previously placed in a historiographic blind spot, and for whom works this visibility; and how to deal with the prevailing categorization of Latin American conceptualism as ideological, the latter being a signifier of difference. The following questions arise from this debate: Is Latin American conceptualism different from the one established in the canon? Is this difference a consequence of the practices or of the categorisation to which these practices are submitted?

Brief history of an oblivion

The exhibition *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*³ can be considered a statement in the disclosure of a previously dismissed part of the international art scene. The curators’ intention was to expand the term “conceptualism” chronologically and geographically, and to open its aesthetic characterisation, beyond the narrowest versions of conceptual art. The extension of this art history blind spot, that encompassed every region except US and Europe, can be examined looking at how this oblivion came about. Lucy Lippard’s *Six years: the dematerialisation of the art object from 1966 to 1972* is considered one of the most influential books in which conceptual art is characterised, or better said, described⁴. In this volume Lippard includes a political “branch” of conceptual art, opening the prospect of a wider version of it, beyond the US and Europe⁵. The chosen format, a chronological list of dematerialised artworks, has *in potentia* the possibility to be extended in time and space, but she nevertheless feels obliged to establish some boundaries⁶. Despite “decentralisation and internationalism” are explicitly important for her, the list of non-western locations is relatively small. The establishment of this numerical and concrete inaugural moment implied that for most of other times and spaces conceptual art was placed in a moment of reception, that rendered it delayed in time and peripheral in space. In her defence I should say that Lippard is conscious of the impossibility of an encyclopaedic project and that the expanding “chronological-indexical format” tries to circumvent discursive traps. Moreover, from the beginning she asserts subjectivity as her starting point. Talking in first person made her experiences intentionally local⁷. The problem arises when this local scenario is transposed to the rest of the world as a canonical model, which surely was not her intention.

During the late 1970s and the 1980s there was a lack of publications and exhibitions in the western context, so the possibility of fixing a “similarity of aesthetic intention” was placed on hold⁸. The discursive construction only happened from 1988 on, beginning in France with a critical mass of exhibitions⁹. In the catalogue of one of these shows¹⁰, it is included a text by Benjamin Buchloh, which was going to become one of the key pieces in the definition of conceptual art in the 1990s. Between 1988 and 1999 the canonical discourse about conceptual art is established in the western context through exhibitions and publications¹¹. This historiographic review coincided with a need to re-assess the meaning and aftermaths of conceptual art in a scenario where these practices began to be influential for the late 1980s artists, and, at the same time, conceptual artworks were increasingly becoming marketable and “exhibitible”¹². The “return” of conceptual art was both cause and effect of its own canonisation.

Regarding its definition it can be observed that its nature as a signifier is problematic and elusive, and that a possible characterisation runs along two main divides that operate in degrees of openness. One model is articulated around the divide between the so-called linguistic version and an extended form of conceptual, which incorporates the critique of artistic institutions (in Buchloh’s 1989 version they represent respectively a “bad” and a “good” conceptualism). This version usually considers only western artists. A different model is organised around a divide in which, alongside with the linguistic version, the critical branch expands from the revealing of institutional conditionings to the socio-economic-political contexts. This historiographic variety is developed in a 1974’s essay of Spanish professor Simón Marchán and further developed by Ramírez.

Just What Is It that Makes “Ideological Conceptualism” So Different, So Appealing?

Within the context of these revisions Ramírez puts forward in 1993 her earliest statement about conceptualism in Latin America¹³. She recuperates Marchán’s analysis in order to reinscribe the actuality of an autonomous development of conceptual art that took place in Argentina and Spain. Marchán proposes a characterisation that comprises two philosophical traditions elucidating the term “concept”, that led to two different operating modes, the “proposition” and the “project”. The “proposition” brings together the analytical/tautological practices (i.e. Kosuth) with the linguistic practices. These last ones, operating as language, can be used for associative, evocative or metaphorical purposes (i.e. Weiner or Barry). In the “project” version, the artist is considered a researcher that explores “the comprehension and reflection on the data of (any) experience, focusing more in the mechanisms of significance than in meaning itself”¹⁴.

In the moment where Marchán was writing the “project art” format was not developed as fully as it did with postconceptual practices. The most significant examples that he could analyse were related to what he called an “empiric-medial” art, which was concerned with perception as a form of apprehension of the real and the semiotic dimensions of the artwork. He labels as “ideological conceptualism” a “sub-branch” of this second variety of conceptualism, characterised as a practice that goes beyond the tautological speculations, artistic projects aiming to assess reality in a critical way. Inscribed in the tradition of critique, conceptualist art incorporates a self-reflection about its own

conditions of production (therefore engaging with the critique of art as an institution), and also the possibility to extend this critique to the social historical context. He presents the cases of Argentinean and Spanish conceptualist practices as examples. For Marchán, through conceptual art, “artistic activity becomes one of the specific modes of practical apprehension of reality”. The examples he provides for “ideological conceptualism” are related to the critique of mass media, but the possibility of transforming it into a *modus operandi* with a larger applicability, which includes the examination of socio-economic-political issues through art, remained latent for two decades. In 1993 Ramírez reactivates this forgotten version of conceptualism, expanding the Argentinean and Spanish cases to other artistic practices in Latin America that, since the 1960s, were addressing precisely these issues beyond the medium-specific formats. In 1999 the exhibition *Global Conceptualism* extended this characterisation to a global view.

The cost of a Global Conceptualism

The apex of conceptualism’s globalisation indicates paradoxically the limits of its strength. As in conceptual art, its canonisation is cause and effect of its neutralisation. Global conceptualism as a historiographic category has become ineffectual in its geographical and aesthetic extension, especially in a globalised world. Conceptualism’s ineffectuality can be apprehended by its effects in the field. The recently founded Red de Conceptualismos del Sur share a common interest in the interrogation of these “effects”, conveyed in different topics. Most critics of the Red are concerned with the costs following the visibility of Latin American art, which paradoxically produces other invisibilities. In Ramírez’ proposal some artistic scenes were privileged chronologically (Argentina, Brazil and Mexico)¹⁵, becoming signifiers that shadowed other national realities. Along with this national decompensation, the Red is sensitive to the fact that, with the museification and globalisation of these works, the practices run the risk of being subsumed in an officialised and neutralised version of Latin American art, ready to be exported to the world. In this respect, the power of exhibitions as tools, in the construction of discourses in the global era, complicates the historiographic field. As an example a similar process can be observed in the exhibition *Global feminisms* (2007). However, not all the contexts of creation/reception behave similarly. In the US “Latin American”, as a signifier of difference, is still the primary word in the equation. In the construction of the US self-image, museums and public collections play an important role, but as they buy previously dismissed conceptual pieces and archives, a process of mercantilisation of the artworks starts. Re-enacted practices/works become commodities for exhibition/collection purposes and help fetishisation.

In Europe, where the relationship between art and politics is being reassessed since the 2000s, there has been a “rediscovery” of 1960s and 1970s artistic practices worldwide, in which “ideological” is the crucial word. The showing of these practices in exhibitions provokes another side effect. The good faith of a new generation of curators working within the institutions contributes paradoxically to officialise political art. Their critical nucleus vanishes in a homogenising version of a radical-global contemporary art, a shared feature with most 1960s and 1970s recuperated activist art. Beyond this neutralisation, Joaquín Barriendos alerts of a different danger arising from a renovated

romantic view of the peripheral, based on the “prejudice that outside the western world artists are in a closer contact with reality, with the people and with the multitudes and therefore their art is more real, more effective “politically speaking”¹⁶. This idea will correlate with the notion that, due to the weakness of the Latin American institutional artistic field, artists can intervene in the public sphere with less mediations. In this view the canonical value of the origin is inverted: instead of peripheral practices imitating formally the original ones, Latin American political practices as seen as genuine.

In the Latin American context the effects take place in the temporal axis and have to do with the administration of memory, as officialisation or as mythification. The dictatorial regimes and the lack of interest of the Latin American elites prevented an early commodification, which happened in the western context, but provoked a long amnesia. The recovery of the memory of these practices, and also the archives, has involved in the last decades a rescue operation of an episode of history forgotten and denied. This discovery has contributed to construct a common ground for a new generation of artists who grew up with suppressed references¹⁷. However this heritage runs the risk to be transformed into a myth of origin, fossilising its legacy¹⁸.

These three risks, mercantilisation, officialisation and mythification, all ending in neutralisation, epitomised the mode in which “difference” and “radicality” become discursive in the global moment. In this respect, Ana Longoni poses the question of the effects within a discursive position close to Foucault’s idea of critique. Longoni acknowledges that the effects influencing Latin American art are not only and anymore the result of an external historiographic imposition, but also a consequence of the Latin American participation in historiography as subjects. In her case this subjectivity is bravely put forward in a first person mode, when she poses questions departing from her own uneasiness before certain experiences, conscious of her participation in the process, and aware of her responsibility in the possible consequences¹⁹. For Longoni the difficulty to be addressed has to do more with the possibility of performing a critique of the present. The question will be if there is anything at all that can be reactivated in the experiences of the past. Her historiography transcends the interpretation of the facts and becomes an ethical-political tool²⁰. A different strategy to subvert the historiographic frame and provoke other effects comes from Miguel López. Reinterpreting an artwork by Eduardo Costa, that “mistook” the historical dates²¹, López proposes an intensification of the temporal “misunderstandings” extended to a point in which history and historiography are revealed as fictions. López’ tactic is an artistic one and it aims to subvert the discipline by displacing it to a complete different order. Historiography transcends the interpretation of the facts and becomes a poetical tool²².

Conceptualism between Supplement and Inverted map

Between the Cold War and the advent of globalisation, the double bind posed to non-western artistic practices obliged them to navigate through canon and difference. *Global Conceptualism*, besides the effects, achieved a break in the prevailing historiography²³, and also began to work in a symbolic level. The operation through which a canon is disrupted can be looked at with the concept of supplement in Derrida. The supplement

can be defined as something that, allegedly secondary, comes to serve as an aid to something (supposedly) “original”. But supplementing is not an operation of adding in order to construct a whole version. On the contrary, it instigates a permanent suspicion about the idea of origin, as the original proves untenable and is only produced as an effect of signs. The logic of supplementation turns the “original” into a supplement itself. The addition of the “other conceptualisms” to the “canon” not only cast a shadow on the chronological presumptions, but also on the manner conceptual had been described. For instance, as Lippard states that her trip to Argentina is in the “origin” of a “political branch”, a two-way road is set from the beginning (origin becomes supplement). Also Marchán, talking from a “peripheral” site includes other forms of conceptualism as part of the canon and, in addition to it, builds a categorization of conceptual art that encompass most of its variations and transcends its chronological and spatial determination.

The emancipation from the necessity of origins and the broadening of the term affect all the historiographic subjects. It allows us to consider as conceptualist other practices that use the “project version” to look at political, economical and social issues, beyond the narrow institutional critique model. Ideological conceptualist practices in fact existed in the western context since the 1960s, but they were categorised under other names²⁴. At the same time, tautological, linguistic or evocative artworks taking place in highly politicised contexts, can be re-evaluated. The wider notion of conceptualism helps to erode the divide that placed them in a position of under or mis-recognition. But this perspective points towards a suture in which all artistic practices are located in the same plane.

The logic of supplementation is based on chained supplements. In this respect, the Red de Conceptualismos del Sur operates as a supplement of the supplement whose endeavours are symptomatic of a new historiographic turn, that paradoxically needs to reactivate difference. The postcolonial inter-national paradigm has lost part of its currency, in favour of a renewed version of the world self-image, based on a re-alignment of regions in the place of nations, where difference is produced and consumed in other ways. As Sarat Maharaj asserts: “We have come to see the international space as the meeting ground for a multiplicity of tongues, visual grammars and styles. These do not so much translate into one another as translate to produce difference”. Multiple differences compete for a symbolic place within a state of indifferentiation. How do we navigate in the ocean of in/differences? In order to withhold the singularities belonging to a re-defined region (Latin America and Spain), the Red has chosen to distinguish itself with the mark “del Sur”, an operation that resonates with Torres-García’s Escuela del Sur, with its symbolic implications. In this case the “difference” is not constructed from an outside, but it is established consciously from within, and aims to have an antagonistic profile.

Who’s afraid of Latin American neo-avantgarde?

Dismantling the divide conceptual/conceptualist should be complemented with the possibility to rethink the causal links that previously articulated the genealogy. For

instance, in the US historiography, conceptual art is understood as originating both as a consequence and as a reaction to minimalism²⁵. In the supplement scenario the question could be rephrased in this way: is there a conceptualist art that doesn't come from minimal art? In the realm of a worldwide conceptualism, how do we re-assess neo-avantgarde? My argument is that we cannot discuss "conceptualism" without taking a position regarding a reconsideration of the neo-avantgarde debate in Latin America. After Peter Bürger's seminal book (who coined the term neo-avantgarde), the theory of neo-avantgarde became a theory of avant-garde. Bürger initiates two different processes. First he redefines avant-garde, changing its categorization: what has previously been a historical account of modern practices, widely known as "isms", is redefined as a critical concept and a theoretical model²⁶. Secondly he designates the attempts of re-activation of the avantgardist practices since the 1950s (in opposition to modernist, medium-specific practices) with a new category, neo-avantgarde. Bürger asserts that all neo-avantgarde is a "fake" avant-garde²⁷.

The battle for neo-avantgarde in the US is especially important, as their "first great phase of modernist art emerged as late as the 1940s", as Geeta Kapur observes²⁸. In the US scenario neo-avantgarde should therefore be considered their first avant-garde and conceptualism one of its forms. The movements originated in the US tended to adopt a different naming system: performance art, body art, op art, pop art, conceptual art, in opposition to the "ism" suffix used in the European historical movements. In the supplement scenario, the usage of conceptualism, instead of conceptual art, promotes a significant re-interpretation. Along with the aesthetic opening of the concept (present in Marchán's historiographic legacy), the use of the "ism" suffix facilitates a reading of conceptualism that strategically takes advantage and capitalises the internationalism present in the historical "isms". This internationalism cannot be separated from the modern project itself and the early 20th century avant-garde. As Raymond Williams asserts the modern project cannot be understood without the emigration and the exile factors and the encounter of different cultures²⁹. However, the US neo-avantgarde has evident nationalist (anti-European) elements, symptomatic of the fact that they also were weighed down by their concerns with European avantgarde influences, which they constantly tried to deny. In that respect, Buchloh's theoretical project is to a great extent based on the critique of the deficiencies of reception of the original European avant-garde in the US.

Considering that there is not one, but several *traditions of the new*, what was happening meanwhile in Latin America? Was there a Latin American neo-avantgarde? The idea of a neo-avantgarde, with such a name, has not been very popular in the Latin American historiography. In the US neo-avant-garde can be considered their first avant-garde, whereas in Europe (both West and East), and Latin America, the debate is related to the possibility of updating and re-activating the pre-war avant-garde's legacy, in modes that differ greatly from place to place, from artist to artist. This creates a confusing situation: US first avant-garde is named neo-avantgarde, whereas Latin American neo-avantgarde tends to be categorised as avant-garde. Additionally, there is a continuous refusal in the Latin American scene to accept the labels of the movements that the western critics coined, such as pop art or conceptual art, Apart from the natural resistance of artists to be

classified under any label, there is an ideological resistance to adopt what were considered “imported” practices, that fitted with difficulties in a situation of economic underdevelopment and political repression³⁰. Moreover, as López suggests, there was an existing naming practice in the local contexts (i.e., no-objetualismo in Mexico), which need to be revisited³¹. All these contradictions situate post-war Latin American art in a historiographic no-man’s land: not in the neo-avantgarde and within a distinct interpretation of the historical avant-garde, not easily comparable.

The debate should be therefore placed in the different modes in which the Latin American neo-avantgarde was imagined and theorised, as a continuation of the avantgardist project³². This question should be oriented to redefine the conditions of possibility of art, its meaning and its function in the post-war context, in the wider intellectual horizon that neo-avantgarde represents and questions. What is certain is that there were a large number of artistic activities going on in the Latin American context that tried to reactivate the avant-garde legacy and that what is at stake is not a discussion about the reactivation of avant-garde, but about how this actually took place. Most Latin American historians and curators are inclined to explore the density of the network of traditions and mutual influences between multiples sites (artists, nations, regions), but they disagree about which legacy was to be reactivated and which relations were significant in the post-war scenario. For instance Luis Pérez Oramas is more inclined to a version in which Latin American art re-elaborates directly European historical avant-garde, while M^a Carmen Ramírez is more open to the idea of an exchange with some of the US neo-avantgarde movements³³. Therefore the expansion of “conceptualism” made in aesthetic terms (proposition and critical project) needs to be reframed in the avant-garde’s legacy and in the discussions around the problems of characterising a Latin American neo-avant-garde.

How ideological is Latin American conceptualism?

In relation to neo-avantgarde it is interesting to consider how the specificities of Latin American conceptualism have been described, as authors propose different features³⁴. In the case of Luis Camnitzer and Ramírez, both have in common a “conflicted relation to dematerialisation” that seems to play an emblematic role in opposition to Lippard’s book. Regarding the variances, Camnitzer stresses the importance of the linguistic and theoretical components of Latin American conceptualism, for he defends an early reception of linguistics and structuralism in Latin America, differently to the US. In this realm Ramírez emphasises linguistics especially in relation to communication and information theories that interrogate the meaning production system. Camnitzer highlights the literary analogue as important in the poetical search. Finally Camnitzer gives a significant responsibility to pedagogy for, as he states in the title of his book, conceptualism is a “didactics for liberation” and empowerment (following authors like Freire). For Ramírez the pedagogical input is not stated in educational terms, but rather as a transformation through active action. For her, the viewer’s participation and a redefinition of audience are more related to the idea of pathia (participation) and pathos (contamination).

The expanded characterisation of conceptualism, with its balance between the proposition and project varieties, makes unnecessary the discussion in terms of “dematerialisation”, in opposition to the linguistic anglo-saxon version. Therefore the key point in understanding what is different in Latin American conceptualism seems to arise from two other features. On the one hand, there is the displacement from the object to the viewer’s participation. In the US version, one of the key points of connection between minimalism and conceptual was organised around the activation of the viewer and the awareness of the container’s signifying potential. This led to the questioning of the white cube, as one of the first steps of the making legible of the institutional frame, that showed the way to other institutional conditionings³⁵. Yet, other neo-avantgarde strategies, such as happening/performances and pop/environments, frequent in Latin American art, also facilitated a path towards contextual awareness through the idea of real time and real space and the importance given to spectatorship/participation. But challenging conventional structures of apprehension of the real by acting on subjective positions was also taking place in other non-Latin American contexts, so it cannot be regarded as a Latin American specificity. To be distinctively “ideological” the viewer’s participation and audience construction needs to be informed by a critical engagement with economic precariousness and/or socio-political conditions and/or has the intention of advocating an alternative. In Latin America some of the practices were directly political, but others can be considered ideological only in a broad sense.

A second distinguishing feature is based on the use of communication and information theories that questioned the systems of meaning production, and the reconsideration of the artwork as a mediatory object (that operates in the substitution of material by media formats³⁶). This corresponds exactly to the idea of what “ideological” was supposed to mean in the 1960s, especially following Barthes’ *Mythologies* and McLuhan’s *Understanding media*. In an accurate sense, conceptualist practices were in fact anti- or counter-ideological, as they aimed to deconstruct the ways in which mass media were creating reality. As we have said previously, from Marchán’s 1974 perspective, “ideological” only characterised the type of conceptualist practices that were also known as media-art. Ramírez’ version of conceptualism tries to expand the adjective ideological beyond counter-media art, but retains the confusing meaning of ideological, too linked to the 1950s and 1960s Marxist epistemological horizon. Critical conceptualism, an adjective closer to the post-modern theoretical sensibility, would have been a better option to expand the concept.

To conclude I will argue that there is not an essence regarding “Latin American conceptualism”, nor in relation to the geographical difference, nor to the orthodoxy of the artistic category. Conceptualism is an unstable historiographic category, subjected to a permanent negotiation of characterising differences and audiences that have different stakes in its usage. “Conceptualism in Latin America” eludes the essentialist connotations that “Latin American conceptualism” may imply. However, conceptualism should be analysed in the context of the whole range of neo-avantgardist practices coming out from the avant-garde legacy, occurring in different regions. Also it should go beyond what is usually known as conceptual art. These practices promoted an interrogation on the apprehension of the real, questioning what is art and in some cases the socio-political-

economic contexts in which art takes place. This epistemological-artistic project is better described as critical than ideological, this type of criticality being an aspect that developed with intensity in the Latin American scenario of the 1960s and 1970s within a wide network of contextual exchanges.

¹ The Red describes itself as “formed by artists, curators, historians and researchers, from México, Perú, Ecuador, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Colombia and Spain” in “Desbordantes”, *Desbordes*, n° 0, (June 2009) http://des-bordes.net/des-bordes/quienes_somos.php (accessed September 30, 2009).

² In her article “Strategies of Modernity in Latin America” Andrea Giunta describes three distinct strategies that transgress and deconstruct the main narrative of modernity in Latin America, the strategy of swallowing, the Inverted Map and the Appropriation of Appropriation. The Inverted Map is the strategy Joaquín Torres-García launched in 1935 in his manifest *La Escuela del Sur*, whose most known graphic image is the globe map turned upside down, where “Our north is the South”. Andrea Giunta, “Strategies of Modernity in Latin America” in *Beyond the Fantastic. Contemporary art criticism from Latin America*, ed. Gerardo Mosquera (London: InIva, 1995), 53-66.

³ It took place in Queens Museum of Art, New York in 1999. The curators were Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss.

⁴ Other books contemporaneous to it: Klaus Honnef, *Concept Art*, (Cologne: Phaidon, 1971); Ermanno Migliorini, *Conceptual Art* (Florence: 1971); Ursula Meyer, ed., *Conceptual Art* (New York: Dutton, 1972). Previous articles elaborating the concept Henry Flynt's "Concept Art" in *An Anthology of Chance Operations* (1963) and Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" (1967).

⁵ “In my own experience, the second branch of access to what became Conceptual art was a jurying trip to Argentina in 1968. I returned belatedly radicalized by contact with artists there, especially the Rosario Group, whose mixture of conceptual and political ideas was a revelation”. Lucy Lippard, *Six years: the dematerialisation of the art object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley/London: University of California Press, 1973- 2001), ix.

⁶ “They would be unmanageable if *some* similarity of aesthetic intention were not maintained. This is not a book about *all* dematerialised art and the point I want to make is phenomenological rather than historical” (“some” and “all”, in italics in the original) in Lucy Lippard, *Six years: the dematerialisation of the art object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley/London: University of California Press, 1973- 2001).

⁷ This subjectivity means that she is not trying to build an art history textbook, but rather a kind of autobiographical volume, which in fact looks like a conceptual artwork itself. Chronology goes hand in hand with biography. Lippard is careful in acknowledging that the narration that she is constructing is just her own personal narration in her case the New York art scene of the late 1960s, her partners, her friends and her trips.

⁸ The exhibitions in the late 1970s and early 1970s were in fact not “about” conceptual art but “of” conceptual art. Some of them in US and Europe are: Seth Siegelau’s: *January 5-31, March 1-31 and July, August, September*, all in 1969, New York; Harald Szeemann’s *When Attitudes Become Form*, Kunsthalle Bern, 1969; Lucy Lippard’s *557,087*, Seattle Art Museum, 1969; *955,000*, Vancouver, 1970, *2,972,453*, CAYC, Buenos Aires, 1970, *c. 7,500*, California Institute of the Arts + 7 venues ending in London, 1973; *Op Losse Schroeven : Situaties en Cryptostructurens*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1969; *Konzeption/Conception*, Städt. Museum Leverkusen et al., 1969; *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects*, New York Cultural Center, 1970; *Art in the Mind*, Oberlin, Ohio, Allen Memorial Art Museum, 1970; *Information*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1970; *Software*, New York, Jewish Museum, 1970; *Situation Concepts*, Innsbruck, Forum für aktuelle Kunst, 1971. The best known series of exhibitions in these years in Latin America took place in Argentina a bit earlier: *Experiencias 1968*, Buenos Aires and *Ciclo de Arte Experimental* Rosario, in 1968.

⁹ *Art conceptuel I*, (Bordeaux: CAPC Musée d’art contemporain de Bordeaux, 1988); *L’art conceptuel*, (Paris: ARC–Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989); *Art Conceptuel Formes Conceptuelles/Conceptual Art; Conceptual Forms* (Paris: Galerie 1900–2000 and Galerie de Poche, 1990).

¹⁰ Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions" in the catalogue of the exhibition *L'art conceptuel* (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989).

¹¹ One of the most influential exhibitions was *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995). Publications before 1999 include Juan Vicente Aliaga & José Miguel G. Cortés, ed., *Arte Conceptual Revisado/Conceptual Art Revisited* (Valencia: Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, 1990); Thomas Dreher, *Konzeptuelle Kunst in Amerika und England zwischen 1963 und 1976* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992); Robert C. Morgan, *Conceptual Art: An American Perspective*, Jefferson, (New York/London: McFarland, 1994); Robert C. Morgan, *Art into Ideas: Essays on Conceptual Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon, 1998).

¹² Julia Bryan-Wilson, "A Curriculum of Institutional Critique", in *New Institutionalism*, ed. Jonas Ekeberg (Oslo: OCA/Verksted, 2003), 89–109.

¹³ Already in 1993 M^a Carmen Ramírez had advanced the importance of conceptual artistic practices in Latin America throughout the 1960s-1970s, using for them the category "ideological conceptualism", a characterisation that will be extended in subsequent essays. M^a Carmen Ramírez, "Blueprint Circuits: Conceptual Art and Politics in Latin America", in *Latin American Artists of the XX century*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1993) and M^a Carmen Ramírez, "Tactics for thriving on Adversity. Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960-1980" in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origins, 1950s-1980s*, exh cat, ed. Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999).

¹⁴ The translation is mine.

¹⁵ M^a Carmen Ramírez, "Tactics for thriving on Adversity. Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960-1980" in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origins, 1950s-1980s*, exh cat, ed. Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999).

¹⁶ The translation is mine. Joaquín Barriandos, "Desconquistas (políticas) y redescubrimientos (estéticos)" in *Desbordes* n° 0 (June 2009), http://des-bordes.net/des-bordes/joaquin_barriandos.php (accessed September 30, 2009).

¹⁷ Ana Longoni, "Is Tucumán Still Burning?", *Sociedad*, vol.1, n° se, (2006).

¹⁸ Jaime Vindel, "Los 60 desde los 90: notas acerca de la reconstrucción historiográfica (en clave conceptualista) de la vanguardia argentina de los años sesenta", *Ramona*, n° 82, (2008).

¹⁹ "Hay algo de esa experiencia de desolación extrema y ajenidad ante el (centro mismo del) mundo del arte que me interpela de una manera incómoda que no pasaré por alto. Desde esa molestia es que exploro algunas preguntas que quieren no ser meros ejercicios retóricos en tanto no tengo respuestas convincentes ni cerradas. (...) Podría decirse que la apuesta de nuestros proyectos intelectuales por conjurar esa sensación de desolación (en su versión más extrema) o de desazón (en la más moderada) es clave en la voluntad de constituir esta plataforma de pensamiento, discusión e intervenciones conjuntas", Ana Longoni, "Dilemas irresueltos. Preguntas ante la recuperación de los conceptualismos de los años sesenta" (2008), www.lamella.com.ar/files/Dilemas%20irresueltos.DOC (accessed September 30, 2009).

²⁰ In her case the answer is set in the realm of promise and based in "collective energies", Ana Longoni, "Dilemas irresueltos. Preguntas ante la recuperación de los conceptualismos de los años sesenta" (2008), www.lamella.com.ar/files/Dilemas%20irresueltos.DOC (accessed September 30, 2009).

²¹ "A piece that is essentially the same as a piece made by any of the first conceptual artists, dated two years earlier than the original and signed by somebody else". Artwork by Eduardo Costa, presented in *Art in the mind* (Oberling College: Allen Art Museum, 1970).

²² "Reintegrar el componente subversivo de aquello que historiamos (...) el punto donde su propia contradicción haga ver que ésta no ha sido nunca de nadie. Reconocerla como un artefacto puramente instrumental –y por ello mismo político-. Ese lugar sin lugar donde lo que importa son sus efectos (de lo que fueron capaces, aquello que aún hoy pueden), antes que integrarlos simplemente en la unidad de un discurso", Miguel López "Robar la historia, traicionar el arte conceptual", *Desbordes*, n° 0, (June 2009), http://des-bordes.net/des-bordes/miguel_lopez.php (accessed September 30, 2009). A similar doubt about historiography is posed by Joaquín Barriandos in the same issue of *Desbordes*.

²³ This break can be noticed in books such as Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, *Conceptual Art: a critical anthology* (Cambridge/London: MIT, 1999); Charles Harrison, *Conceptual art and painting*

(Cambridge/London: MIT, 2001); Paul Wood, *Conceptual Art* (London: Tate Publishing, 2002); Peter Osborne, *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon, 2002).

²⁴ For instance, some practices usually characterised in the US as activist or conceptual feminism could be reframed in this way. In fact they have different labels based on class or identity struggles. This is to say that the naming plays a different role in each context. The same argument is explored by Fernando Davis in “El conceptualismo como categoría táctica”, *Ramona*, n° 82 (Julio, 2008).

²⁵ For instance, Lippard states this evolution. As an example of this debate see Jaime Vindel and Fernando Davis debate in *Ramona*, n° 82 (Julio, 2008), about the influence of Primary Structures in the Argentinean context.

²⁶ Avant-garde as a historically determined and self-reflective praxis is for Bürger specifically oriented to the attack of the artistic institutional frames, both organisational and ideological. Peter Bürger, *Teoría de la vanguardia* (Barcelona: Península, 1987).

²⁷ About a debate around neo-avant-garde see, Víctor del Río, “El concepto de neovanguardia en el origen de las teorías del arte posmoderno” *Octavas falsas. Materiales de arte y estética 2* (Salamanca, Luso-Española de Ediciones, 2006), 111-142.

²⁸ Geeta Kapur, *When was modernism* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2000), 374.

²⁹ Raymond Williams, “When was modernism”, *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London: Verso, 1989).

³⁰ In the 1960s the artists were asking if it was possible to develop, or merely adopt, pop-art in a region with no consumer society. Or minimalism without industrialisation. Or a dematerialised, anti-object art, in an economy with a weak art market. There is a recurrent denial and resistance of the possibility of having a Latin American pop art or minimalism, due to the conditions of economic underdevelopment (Beatriz González, Artur Barrio, Glauber Rocha)

³¹ “O reconsiderar un concepto como el “no-objetualismo” formulado en México por el crítico peruano Juan Acha hacia 1973, como parte de un proceso de repolitización personal y redireccionamiento marxista, desde su crítica al objeto de arte burgués a través de una reflexión sobre la práctica estética vernácula de lo popular y lo indígena” in Miguel López, “Robar la historia, traicionar el arte conceptual”, *Desbordes*, n° 0, (June 2009), http://des-bordes.net/des-bordes/miguel_lopez.php (accessed September 30, 2009).

³² An example of this type of procedure in Andrea Giunta, *Avant-garde, internationalism, and politics. Argentine Art in the Sixties* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2007).

³³ Luis Pérez Oramas: “Due to the “privileged reception given to the formal migration of subjectivist, surrealist and expressionist artists and movements after the 1940s (...) The constructivist and conceptual tendencies of the European avant-gardes would have to wait well into the 1960s until the advent of minimalism to find fertile ground in North America (...) while “the constructive and conceptual tendencies of European avantgarde found a terrain receptive to adoption, migration, and transfiguration, which facilitated their early and favourable reception in Latin America”, Luis Pérez Oramas, “Looking South: Strategic Visions, Tactical Revisions” in *A principality of its own*, ed. José Luis Falconi and Gabriela Rangel (New York: The Americas Society, 2006), 49-50. Whereas Ramírez: “Unlike the US, where minimalism provided the grounds for the emergence of conceptual art, in Latin America the passage from object to idea-based art originated in a wide array of sources grounded in informalism, pop, and modes of geometric abstraction. (...) In some Latin American countries conceptualism not only contested existing forms of bourgeois art, but was simultaneously redefining an earlier model of the Latin American avant-garde (...) characterised by: “a paradoxical form of avant-garde art based on an unusual notion of tradition, understood as the “actualization” of the legacy of western art from the untainted perspective of New World societies”, M^a Carmen Ramírez, “Tactics for thriving on Adversity. Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960-1980” in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origins, 1950s-1980s*, exh cat, ed. Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999), 60-62.

³⁴ For Luis Camnitzer there are four basic elements: the function of dematerialization; the role of pedagogy; the use of text, and the literary analogue used as a model for art. Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007). For Ramírez there are three articulating features: a) a strong ideological and ethical profile that provoked an engagement with the real and a conflicted relation to “dematerialisation”; b) a switch from perception to viewer’s participation and a redefinition of the audience and the public sphere as an integral component; c) the use of communication and information theories in order to countercirculate messages. M^a Carmen Ramírez, “Tactics for thriving on Adversity. Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960-1980” in *Global Conceptualism:*

Points of Origins, 1950s-1980s, exh cat, ed. Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999).

³⁵ This is the version put forward by Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

³⁶ Chronologically the first appearance of the word “dematerialise” is already a re-elaboration of a term from El Lissitzky by Oscar Masotta in 1967, through which the latter makes a symbolic link with the historical avantgarde, while aiming to overcome contemporaneous neo-avantgarde tendencies (happenings, pop art). Media art, in Masotta's view comes as an evolution/reaction to happening, which he had previously championed. Alexander Alberro is in this line of thought in Alexander Alberro, 'A Media Art: Conceptualism in Latin America in the 1960s', in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, ed. Jon Bird and Michael Newman (London: Reaktion, 1999).

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Insertion strategies and politics of visibility: the conceptualism paradigm

(‘Latin America’ at the global scene)

Gabriela A. Piñero

Key words: Conceptualism, Latin America, Global Art Scene

This article analyzes the theoretical framework implied in the study of the so-called “peripheral art practices” at the end of the XX century. In particular, during the 90’s, some interventions —artistic works, texts, etc.— increased their visibility along with the emergence of a new situation characterized as the “global art circuit” (Enwezor, 2006) or the “new global order” (Giunta, 2002).

This research focuses on the reformulation of the conceptualism paradigm —through the idea of a “global conceptualism”— and its implications for the “Latin American Art”. This article specially analyses the strategies articulated by the exhibition *Global Conceptualism. Points of Origin: 1950s-1980s* (New York, Queens Museum of Modern Art, 1999)¹ and Luis Camnitzer’s book *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (2007)² in the questioning and reformulation of the conceptualism paradigm.

¹Becke Laszlo, ed., *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin: 1960s-1980s* (New York: Queens Museum of Modern Art, 1999)

² Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of liberation* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2007)

One of the hypotheses of this article is that both *Global Conceptualism* and *Didactics of Liberation* articulate specific strategies in their aim at destabilizing and questioning hegemonic narratives, and negotiating the inclusion of productions that used to be marginalized from the hegemonic narratives. One of the strategies articulated in the exhibition and in the book is the strong emphasis on the relationship between the artistic practices, and social, economic and political characteristics of their places of production. While this operation fulfilled a wider visibility for some practices, its perverse consequence was to reduce the artistic works to *communicate*, in detriment of an analysis of their formal and material characters through which these considerations could be put into question.

Estrategias de inserción y políticas de visibilidad: el paradigma conceptual

(‘América Latina’ en el escenario global)

Gabriela A. Piñero

REVISIONES

EJERCICIOS DE CRÍTICA HISTÓRICA: *GLOBAL CONCEPTUALISM: POINTS OF ORIGIN 1950s-1980s*

Tradicionalmente abordada desde el horizonte del arte conceptual, la exposición *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950s-1980s* (Queens Museum of Art, New York, 1999)¹ permite una aproximación en tanto dispositivo historiográfico tendiente a desarmar las lógicas explicativas presentes en una concepción tradicional y centralista de la historia del arte. Organizada por Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver y Rachel Weiss, esta exhibición no sólo reformuló la narrativa del arte conceptual tal como estaba construida hacia los años noventa, sino que también logró dislocar las relaciones explicativas hasta entonces dominantes entre las producciones de distintas partes del globo.

A diferencia de la serie de (re)lecturas sobre el arte conceptual realizadas en este período y desplegadas en diversos formatos —estudios críticos que ofrecían nuevos enfoques y

¹ *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* también se exhibió en: Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (19 de Diciembre de 1999 - 5 de Marzo de 2000), Miami Art Museum, Miami (15 de Septiembre - 26 de Noviembre de 2000).

abordajes (Morgan 1994 y 1996), compilación de textos, entrevistas y documentos significativos (Alberro y Stimson 1999, Alberro y Norvell 2001), montaje de exposiciones (*Art Conceptuel I*, Bordeaux, 1988; *L'art conceptuel. Une perspective*, Paris 1989; *Art Conceptuel Formes Conceptuelles-Conceptual Art Conceptual Forms*, Paris, 1990; *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, Los Angeles, 1994-1995)— *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* se constituyó como la única instancia capaz de diversificar los lugares enunciativos de estas historias y alterar los alcances de este movimiento en términos de su *ampliación* geográfica y temporal.

A través de la exploración de diversas regiones geográficas², esta exposición puso en escena una serie de experiencias capaces no sólo de romper con la hegemonía otorgada a Estados Unidos y Europa (especialmente Inglaterra) como *orígenes* de la experimentación conceptual a partir de los años '60s, sino también, de trazar las condiciones de posibilidad para una circulación y visibilidad de las producciones hasta entonces marginadas a un “mismo nivel”, y con igual significancia, complejidad y poder de reflexión/intervención que producciones consideradas “centrales”.

El señalamiento de la multiplicidad de tradiciones culturales y artísticas con las cuales las diversas prácticas filiaban, junto a una serie de operaciones teóricas, habilitó la puesta en crisis de una categoría restringida de arte, y la ruptura con las jerarquías impuestas por la centralidad del objeto modernista. Mientras el reemplazo de la categoría de “arte conceptual” por la de “conceptualismo” desplazó los criterios de valoración centrados en aspectos formales y estilísticos y dispersó la discusión hacia diversos aspectos de *lo estético* y modos de hacer transdisciplinares, la postulación de un “multicenter map with various points of

² *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* exploró once regiones geográficas: Japón; Europa Occidental; Europa de Este; América Latina; Norte América; Australia y Nueva Zelanda; Unión Soviética; África; Corea del Sur; China, Taiwán y Hong Kong; Sur y Sudeste Asiático. Esta división se reprodujo en el catálogo a modo de capítulos dedicados a cada una de estas áreas.

origin”³ rompió la que hasta entonces había sido la lógica explicativa dominante: la dinámica de centro/periferia (o de original/derivativo), y demostró que no se trataba (tanto) de romper un *canon*, sino de lograr su participación en él.

La variedad de revisiones historiográficas experimentadas en el estudio del arte especialmente desde los años ochenta del siglo pasado (las teorías feministas y de género, los estudios culturales y visuales, los discursos poscoloniales, las estrategias de la deconstrucción, etcétera) exigió a importantes instituciones revisar los principios políticos y epistémicos implicados en sus narrativas y diversificar (“contaminar”) no sólo sus relatos, sino también sus objetos. Si en la mayoría de exposiciones de este período organizadas en los “centros”⁴, la representación de las creaciones de diversas culturas se dio bajo la intervención “controlada” de las políticas multiculturales,⁵ esta nueva coyuntura también abrió un espacio para que diversas estrategias de inserción e infiltración fueran ensayadas.

Mi hipótesis de trabajo es que, si por un lado, el fuerte énfasis en los múltiples vínculos entre las diversas producciones y las condiciones sociales, políticas y económicas de sus respectivas localidades de producción, generó la acusación de una “politización compulsiva”⁶ del arte conceptual, por otro lado, fue ésta la estrategia a través de la cual *Global*

³ Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver, Rachel Weiss, “Foreword” en *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin: 1950s-1980s*, ed. Becke Laszlo (New York: Queens Museum of Modern Art, 1999), vii. También: Stephen Bann, “Introduction”, *Op. Cit.*, p. 3.

⁴ Tal vez sea más pertinente hablar de “función-centro”, en la línea de Nelly Richard a partir de conceptualizaciones de Jacques Derrida, en tanto permite pensar esta categoría y otras adyacentes (periferia) como respondiendo, no a un principio geográfico único y estable, sino más bien atender a las sucesivas instancias bajo las cuales en distintos momentos se ejerce un poder discursivo y representativo. Nelly Richard. “Globalización Académica, Estudios culturales y crítica latinoamericana”, en *Estudios Latinoamericanos sobre Cultura y Transformaciones Sociales en tiempos de globalización*, comp. Daniel Mato (Buenos Aires: Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales, 2001), <http://www.globalcult.org.ve/pub/Clacso1/richard.pdf> (Septiembre de 2008)

⁵ Entre algunas de estas exposiciones Kobena Mercer menciona “Magiciens de la Terre” (1989), “The Other Story” (1989), “The Decade Show” (1990) y la Bienal de Whitney de 1993. Kobena Mercer, “Intermezzo Worlds”, Mónica Amor, Okwui Enwezor, Gao Minglu, Oscar Ho, Kobena Mercer, Irit Rogoff, “Liminalities: Discussions on the Global and the Local”, *Art Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Winter, 1998): 43.

⁶ Robert C. Morgan, “Global Conceptualism: Reevaluation or Revisionism?,” *Art Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 3, (Autumn, 1999): 109-111.

Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s logró generar un espacio de visibilidad para las producciones abordadas con cierta autonomía de los parámetros de artisticidad propios de occidente, y negociar la *inserción* de estas producciones en un escenario pretendidamente global. En las próximas páginas exploraré esta operación, sus vínculos con discusiones acerca de “lo latinoamericano” en diversas producciones estéticas y lo que, desde mi perspectiva, son los riesgos de esta aproximación: la reducción de la obra a simple medio o vehículo de una voluntad comunicativa, y una “nueva división del trabajo” entre las producciones de distintas partes del globo.

INSERCIONES

NUEVAS VISIBILIDADES: ‘AMÉRICA LATINA’ EN EL ESCENARIO GLOBAL / LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DEL “CONCEPTUALISMO LATINOAMERICANO”

En el año 2007 Luis Camnitzer publica *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation*. Ya desde las primeras páginas de su libro, Camnitzer vincula su empresa a *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* a través del señalamiento de un origen común:

The origin of this book can be traced to 1991 when Catherine de Zeguer was in the process of organizing the exhibition of Latin American art ‘The Bride of the Sun’ for the Royal Museum of Antwerp. I was one of the invited artists and, given my intrusive nature, immediately crowded her with suggestions about how the show should be both organized and *politicized*. Catherine’s plans were not at all shaken, but she kindly suggested that I write down my ideas. She thought they might be useful in generating another kind of exhibition. The suggestion engenders an initial two-paged laundry list. Subsequent rewritings enlarged the ideas to about 120 pages in 1994. Later, my friends Rachel Weiss and Jane Farver read this version, first as friendly gesture, but then they suggest that we should organized an exhibition. Further discussions and reality checks about funding and venues made it advisable not to limit the exhibition to Latin America, but to give it an international scope. Thus, unexpectedly, the text became a modest and incipient seed for

Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin: 1950s-1980s, an exhibition showed in the Queens Museum in New York five years later.⁷

Esta afirmación de Camnitzer acerca de un mismo detonante —el año de 1991, durante la fase preparatoria de *América, Bride of the Sun*⁸— de *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* y de *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation*, permite trasladar el deseo de revisión *global* encarnado por la exposición de 1999, a una primera voluntad de discusión sobre las construcciones entonces (inicios de los años noventa) imperantes sobre lo “latinoamericano” en el arte y la cultura.

Si en líneas generales los años ochenta se caracterizaron por una construcción hecha desde el “norte”⁹ de las producciones de América Latina en términos de “lo fantástico”¹⁰ —con la carga de ahistoricidad y carencia de poder crítico que esto implica—, y por la exigencia de “la toma de la palabra”¹¹, uno de los debates que marcó los primeros años de la década del

⁷ Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2007), xiii. La cursiva es mía.

⁸ Paul Vandebroek and Catherine De Zegher. *America, Bride of the Sun. 500 years Latin America and the Low Countries* (Antwerp: Royal Museum of Fine Arts/Ludion, 1992).

⁹ Interpreto las nociones de “norte” y “sur” no como localizaciones geográficas, sino en el sentido de la noción de “lugar” según Michel de Certeau; como lugar social, un lugar enunciativo, un lugar de producción socioeconómica, política y cultural en función del cual se establecen los métodos, se precisa la topografía de intereses y se organizan los expedientes de las cuestiones a indagar. Michel de Certeau. *La escritura de la historia* (México: Universidad Iberoamericana, Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Occidente, 2006), 67-118.

¹⁰ La construcción de América Latina en términos de “lo fantástico” es analizada —y criticada— en varios de los textos compilados por Mosquera en: Gerardo Mosquera, ed., *Beyond the Fantastic: contemporary art criticism from Latin America* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT, c1996). Especialmente: Mari Carmen Ramírez, “Beyond ‘the Fantastic’: Framing Identity in US Exhibitions of Latin American Art”, 229-246.

¹¹ Esta exigencia en los ‘80s, puede resumirse en la denuncia que hace Mari Carmen Ramírez acerca de la ausencia de críticos y pensadores latinoamericanos en la exhibición y construcción de sentidos sobre las producciones del continente. De esta situación, condensada en el hecho de que en el catálogo de *Art of the Fantastic: Latin America 1920-1987* las voces de críticos latinoamericanos sean reunidas bajo la rúbrica “Another View”, se desmarcan los primeros intentos (realizados a comienzos de los ‘90s) por organizar, desde el “sur”, grandes exposiciones sobre arte contemporáneo del continente. Por ejemplo, la exposición “Ante América” (1992) curada y organizada por Gerardo Mosquera, Carolina Ponce de León y Rachel Weiss. Mari Carmen Ramírez, *Op. Cit.* Gerardo Mosquera, “Some Problems in Transcultural Curating”, en *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, ed. Jean Fisher (London: Kalo Press in association with the Institute of International Visual Arts, 1994), 105-112.

'90, se derivó de las conmemoraciones acerca del V centenario del llamado, desde una perspectiva europea, “Encuentro de Dos Mundos”.

Si a diferencia de otros dispositivos unidireccionales, *America, Bride of the Sun* propuso un cruce de miradas entre las representaciones de América y Europa, esta operación no dejó de estar arraigada en formaciones epistemológicas europeas: el poder de quién ejerce la decisión sobre la relevancia cultural de las producciones seleccionadas. Ningún pensador latinoamericano (no-europeo) participó en la selección de obras y organización de la muestra, si bien algunos de ellos fueron invitados a escribir varios de los textos del catálogo. Frente a esta situación caracterizada, según Gerardo Mosquera, por la posibilidad de prácticamente dividir al mundo entre “culturas que curan” y “culturas curadas”¹², la resolución de organizar las propias narrativas era el paso consecuente.

La problematicidad de miradas y de ciertas nominaciones queda en evidencia en el diálogo entre Benjamin Buchloh y Catherine de Zegher¹³, cuando la responsable de seleccionar y curar la sección de producciones contemporáneas en *America, Bride of the Sun*, insiste en caracterizar la totalidad de obras —cuyos realizadores provienen no sólo de países como Brasil, Chile y Argentina (Meireles, Dittborn y Grippo), sino también de México (Orozco), Colombia (González) e incluso Estados Unidos (Durham)— como procedentes de “América de Sur”. El problema no reside en una simple cuestión lexical, sino, nuevamente, en quién ejerce el poder de nominación y clasificación, bases no sólo de la producción de conocimiento sino del límite entre objeto y sujeto del conocer.

El reclamo que las experiencias trabajadas en *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* realizaban por un universo conceptual propio, y por una exégesis profunda de

¹² Gerardo Mosquera, *Op. Cit.*, p. 135.

¹³ Benjamin H.D. Buchloh y M. Catherine de Zegher, “Ver America. A Written Exchange”, Paul Vandebroek and Catherine De Zegher. *Op. Cit.*, 223-243.

los condicionantes políticos, económicos y sociales de su emergencia, se presentó como una estrategia adecuada para enfatizar el pasado (no tan pasado) colonial de estas regiones y demostrar cómo éste seguía actuando en el espacio del arte a través de un discurso monolítico basado en nociones de “calidad” y “valor”.

En tanto se trataba de impugnar los lineamientos eurocéntricos y enfatizar la originalidad y especificidad de las nuevas producciones consideradas, en el caso latinoamericano la estrategia de apelación a los contextos se evidenció nuevamente operativa.

En su texto del catálogo destinado a explorar las producciones de América Latina¹⁴, Mari Carmen Ramírez articula una comprensión ampliada del conceptualismo, como una “estrategia de antidiscursos” y como una “manera de pensar”¹⁵ (Ramírez, 1999:53), que le permitió elaborar —retrospectivamente— una narrativa de las producciones latinoamericanas que habría de reiterarse en enunciados posteriores.

En la perspectiva de Ramírez, los factores socio-económicos y políticos no sólo se presentan como condicionantes de la emergencia¹⁶ del conceptualismo en América Latina y de su desarrollo posterior, sino también como los rasgos determinantes de las producciones latinoamericanas: “the *determining* feature of conceptualism in Latin America is the analysis of its relationship to the sociopolitical context”¹⁷

¹⁴ Mari Carmen Ramírez, “Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960-1980”, *Op. Cit.*, 53-71.

¹⁵ La comprensión del arte conceptual (aún no empleada la noción de “conceptualismo”) en un sentido amplio como a “way of thinking”, puede rastrearse en la contribución de Jacqueline Barnitz al catálogo de la exhibición *Encounters/Displacements, Luis Camnitzer, Alfredo Jaar, Cildo Meireles* (1992). Jacqueline Barnitz, “Conceptual Art and Latin America: a Natural Alliance” en *Encounters/Displacements, Luis Camnitzer, Alfredo Jaar, Cildo Meireles*, Mari Carmen Ramírez y Beverly Adams, (Austin: Archer M Huntington Art Gallery, College of Fine Arts, The University of Texas at Austin, 1992), 35.

¹⁶ Si bien Ramírez sostiene que esta emergencia respondió a una compleja serie de circunstancias socio-artísticas, ella enfatiza tres factores: 1) “the failure of the expectations created by the hegemonic project of *desarrollismo*”, 2) “the simultaneous emergence of authoritarian military regimes”, y 3) “a major shift in the understanding of the role of the avant-garde in the Latin American context”, *Idem*, p. 57.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 62. El subrayado es mío.

En un momento de revisión general de las genealogías en la historia del arte, *desmarcar* las producciones latinoamericanas de los lineamientos de los centros, a través de esta estrategia, le sirvió a Ramírez para *remarcar* su autonomía, originalidad e incluso anticipación en relación a las formas políticas desarrolladas durante los ‘70s y ‘80s en los “centros”: “the initial work of these artists clearly anticipated forms of political Conceptualism developed in the 1970s and ‘80s by feminist, multicultural, and other politically engaged movements in central countries”¹⁸. Ni derivadas ni dependientes, las producciones latinoamericanas son ahora antecedentes y fuertes referentes de las experiencias “centrales”.

DISCUSIONES

TERRITORIALIDADES CRUZADAS

¿Cuál es, sin embargo, el costo de este tipo de operación? Sólo posible a través de la insistencia en las especificidades políticas, sociales y económicas como condicionantes de las distintas creaciones (¿actualizada teoría del medio?), la reinscripción del conjunto de experiencias analizadas por Ramírez en una historia *global* del conceptualismo, implicó reforzar una concepción del arte latinoamericano (y de las llamadas periferias en general) como creaciones surgidas de una relación inmediata con lo real. “[L]a tendencia a interpretar

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 56. Unas páginas antes afirma: “the emergence of conceptualism in Latina America not only closely paralleled but, in many key instances, even anticipated important developments of center-based conceptual arts”, p. 53.

las artes periféricas por la adecuación con su contexto no desaparece ni siquiera con los artistas globalizados”¹⁹

Si como señala Nelly Richard, la apelación al contexto, *los* contextos, (entendido como localidad de producción, sitio enunciativo, coyuntura de debate) sirvió para impugnar/cuestionar el “dominio autocentrado de la modernidad occidental-dominante” y “combatir el universalismo —o imperialismo— del valor”²⁰, el riesgo de esta aproximación es el de reducir las distintas obras y experiencias a una lectura en la cual el contexto aparece mostrado (más que *actuado*) y “lo político” no sólo reducido a ilustración de distintos conflictos, sino convertido en sustancia y razón de la obra: “the ideology itself bécame the ‘fundamental *identity*’ for the conceptual proposition”.²¹

¿Cuáles son las consecuencias de afirmar, también en relación a las producciones elaboradas en clave conceptual, de que “on the periphery, Latin America included, the accent was on communication of ideas”²²? Subsumir las distintas obras a una voluntad comunicativa, actualiza una aproximación a la obra que propone su apropiación en términos de ella “al servicio de” en desatención de las especificidades técnicas y matéricas que podrían, justamente, problematizar esta consideración. El acento en el valor comunicacional se inscribe en una línea interpretativa que exige al arte de las llamadas periferias identificarse “contenidísticamente” con “lo real” y la “experiencia”, con la carga “pre-teórica” (Richard, 2004) que esto implica. A la *New International Division of Cultural Labor (NICL)* trabajada

¹⁹ Néstor García Canclini, *La reconstrucción de la teoría del arte y los fracasos de la globalización*, inédito, 2008.

²⁰ Nelly Richard, “El régimen crítico-estético del arte en el contexto de la diversidad cultural y sus políticas de identidad”, (conferencia presentada en el II Coloquio Internacional de Arte Latinoamericano, Facultad de Diseño y Artes, Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, Argentina, Noviembre de 2004).

²¹ Mari Carmen Ramírez, *Op. Cit.*, p. 55. El subrayado es mío.

²² Luis Camnitzer, *Op. Cit.*, p. 1.

por Toby Miller²³, se le superpone otra “perversa” (Richard, 2004) división internacional del trabajo entre la “teoría” y la “práctica”, es decir, entre quienes asumen la experimentación formal y legitimación de los códigos y aquellos de quienes se espera la presentación inmediata (no elaborada) de los propios contextos. A la vez que su irreversibilidad, la globalización revela su fracaso, sostiene García Canclini.²⁴

Si bien tanto *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* como *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* constituyeron importantes intervenciones críticas dirigidas a examinar los principios epistémicos y políticos involucrados en los estudios y exhibición del arte contemporáneo, ambas instancias se revelaron incapaces de poner en crisis la misma categoría colonial sobre la que se fundaron.²⁵ Como “proyecto político de las élites criollo-mestizas” (Mignolo, 2007: 82), “América Latina” se gestó durante los procesos independentistas sobre las bases culturales, lingüísticas y políticas de los pueblos latinos de Europa (españoles, franceses y portugueses), dejando fuera especialmente los pueblos originarios y de descendencia africana.²⁶ En tanto pacto colonial del siglo XIX, “América Latina” implicó también el desplazamiento/silenciamiento de otras territorialidades

²³ Toby Miller, “The New International Division of Cultural Labor”, en *Global Hollywood*, Toby Miller et al., (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 111-172.

²⁴ Néstor García Canclini, *Op. Cit.*, s/p.

²⁵ Esta crítica es válida para casi la totalidad de exposiciones que postularon un acercamiento “panorámico” a las creaciones de América Latina. Una excepción significativa es *Art in Latin America, the Modern Era: 1820-1980*, curada por Dawn Ades en 1989 (posteriormente esta exposición se presentó en Madrid bajo el nombre *Arte en Iberoamérica, 1820-1980*). En la introducción del catálogo, encontramos una breve reflexión acerca del origen de la categoría de “América Latina”, sus connotaciones culturales y políticas, y su relación problemática con otras ideas, por ejemplo la de “la América India”. Dawn Ades, “Introducción”, en *Arte en Iberoamérica, 1820-1980*, (Quinto Centenario Turner, 1990), 1-5.

²⁶ Sobre este proceso y la idea de “latinidad” involucrada: Arturo Ardao, “Génesis de la idea y nombre de América Latina” en *América Latina y la latinidad*, Arturo Ardao (México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1993). También: Walter D. Mignolo, *La idea de América Latina. La herida colonial y la opción decolonial* (Barcelona: Gedisa, 2007). Esta objeción acerca de la denominación y construcción de las diversas regiones, en el caso de *Global Conceptualism*, es también pertinente para las otras áreas geográficas.

que apelaban no sólo a nominaciones diversas, sino también a otras configuraciones y ordenamientos, así como a otras epistemologías, cosmogonías y tradiciones culturales.²⁷

CONTEXTOS Y UNIVERSALISMOS

En un texto del año 2006, Anna Dezeuze²⁸ analiza los peligros del interés, extendido entre artistas y curadores, en la precariedad de las condiciones de existencia —y subsistencia— especialmente en los barrios marginales (villas miseria) de ciudades del “Tercer Mundo”. A partir del análisis de las teorizaciones de curadores y artistas al respecto, Dezeuze identifica dos peligros principales de este interés: por un lado, la no diferenciación —bajo un argumento que se quiera abarcativo de la “precariedad”— de vivencias tan disímiles como las condiciones laborales de los inmigrantes ilegales, los empleado de un *call-centre*, y un diseñador Web que trabaja como *freelance* y, por otra parte, el riesgo de, a través de la exaltación de la “vitalidad” e “imaginación” de las prácticas desarrolladas bajo estas condiciones, erigir no sólo una construcción romantizada (nuevo estereotipo) de la pobreza, sino también de ocluir el sufrimiento inherente imposibilitando formas de agenciamiento político.

Si una de las exposiciones analizadas por Dezeuze, *The Structure of Survival* curada por Carlos Basualdo en el marco de la 50 Bienal de Venecia (2003), le sirve a esta autora para

²⁷ Entre otros ejemplos Walter D. Mignolo aborda el de “Abya-Yala”, nombre propuesto hoy en día por diversos movimientos indigenistas surgidos desde la Antártida hasta el Ártico, y el de “la gran co-marca”, según Mignolo término usado por los pueblos afroandinos en Ecuador y Colombia. También refiere a la desaparición de las regiones de Tawantinsuyu y Anáhuac tras la invención de América, y los proyectos esbozados tras las ideas de “Nuestra América” (José Martí) e “Indo-América” (José Carlos Mariátegui). La exploración de las distintas formas y dinámicas bajo las cuales estos diversos proyectos se entrecruzan y dialogan entre sí, se reconfiguran y cómo son (re)actualizados y habitados desde entonces por prácticas y enunciados, es una tarea pendiente. Walter D. Mignolo, *Op. Cit.*

²⁸ Anna Dezeuze, “Thriving On Adversity: The Art of Precariousness”, *Mute. Culture and Politics after the Net* (Septiembre de 2006), <http://www.metamute.org/en/Thriving-On-Adversity> (Mayo de 2009).

desarrollar los peligros antes mencionados, a mi me interesa volver a esta exposición por otras razones.

Pensada inicialmente como una propuesta tendiente a explorar las producciones de la última década en “Latinoamérica” y sus relaciones con las crisis que azotaron la región (la crisis mexicana a mediados de los años ‘90s, la brasileña a finales de esa década, el colapso argentino en el 2001), esta primera cartografía aspiró a reconfigurarse a partir de lo que Basualdo denominó “[a] mapping of the crises”²⁹. Si bien esta operatoria pretendía romper con la concepción de la(s) crisis como fenómenos (sólo) localizados en áreas específicas (Tercer Mundo, zonas subdesarrolladas o en vías de desarrollo, etcétera) y entenderlas en relación con “[the] growing fragility of the world-system that surpasses and complicates the distinction between developed and developing societies”³⁰, como señala Dezeuze, las obras y proyectos seleccionados por esta exposición enfatizaron experiencias y procesos producidos en/sobre esas zonas (periféricas) reforzando la comprensión tradicional.

La pretensión de Basualdo de “analyze how the art produced in certain contexts cannot avoid interpellating [the crisis]”³¹, privilegia un entendimiento de las obras como *respuestas* a una “crisis” concebida principalmente en términos de deterioro material y fragmentación política. Si bien este autor enfatiza que no se trata de mostrar la crisis (social política y económica) en sí misma o como resultado de determinadas causas, su voluntad de explorar sus *efectos* en el campo del arte, refuerza mi argumento anterior. No pretendo negar las múltiples formas de diálogo entre el arte y determinadas condiciones de existencia en tiempos de “crisis”, sino entender el campo del arte y la cultura como uno de los terrenos privilegiados donde se ensayaron las subjetividades de “tiempos de crisis” capaces de alterar la normalidad

²⁹ Carlos Basualdo, On The Expression Of The Crisis”, *50th Biennale of Venice, Dreams and Conflicts. The dictatorship of the Viewer* (2003), <http://www.favelapavilion.net/text/english/barrios.htm> (Mayo de 2009)

³⁰ *Ídem.*

³¹ *Ídem.*

ciudadina infiltrando tiempos y exigencias distintas. ¿Cómo transmitir, bajo las lógicas de exhibición y recepción impuestas por los espacios internacionales del arte, una práctica como la desarrollada por el *Grupo de Arte Callejero*? Los riesgos de reducir, bajo un deseo de *universalización*, obras pensadas para actuar *en* contexto a simples declaraciones *sobre* un contexto, implica condenar las obras a ser (sólo) producto de determinadas condiciones geopolíticas opacando su capacidad de artífices dentro un juego de mutuas reconfiguraciones.

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Bernardo Salcedo's Internationalist Double-Speak

Gina McDaniel Tarver

Bernardo Salcedo first exhibited artwork in 1964 at the Intercol Salon of Young Artists, held at the Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá and the first of a series of salons sponsored by Esso and its related companies. He emerged as an artist at the height of a period of internationalization in the visual arts of Latin America, as exemplified by the Esso Salons. It was the famous critic and curator Marta Traba, the major proponent of internationalization in Colombia, who discovered and promoted his work. At this time in Colombia, internationalization primarily meant the fostering of artistic styles and movements that were in step with, or even derived from, developments in Europe and the United States. Beginning with the “Pop” collages that he presented at the Intercol Salon and continuing in many works throughout his career, Salcedo took an ironic, often mocking approach toward internationalism. This approach allowed him, from the start, to establish a reputation as a cutting-edge artist worthy of foreign attention and, at the same time, to present critiques of some of the impulses that drove the internationalist push. During the early part of his career, he adapted a wide range of current artistic styles, including Pop art (in his works *Markets for the New Art No. 1 and No. 2*, 1964), Earthworks (in *Elemental Boxes*, 1969 and *Hectare of Hay*, 1970), and Conceptual art (numerous text-based works from 1971–1975). These were visual parodies that targeted international styles and internationalism, but that, I argue, ultimately were aimed at local institutions, artistic and otherwise.

This paper will examine Salcedo's relationship to internationalism, especially as supported in Colombia by institutions such as the Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá and the Bienal de Arte Coltejer in Medellín. I argue that, particularly in cases of artists such as Salcedo, who so adroitly mined international artistic languages, it is impossible to approach Latin American art and its history without careful consideration of external points of contact. For many artists, the international art circuit—as established through museum and biennial exhibitions and specialized journals that were vehicles of art criticism—was an unavoidable frame of reference and a potentially powerful tool. Salcedo, among other artists, took advantage of the circuit whenever possible, presenting a kind of coded double-speak with works that flouted their international look while addressing specifically local concerns. Because local concerns are central to these works, however, approaching them through the lens of internationalism can only be a beginning; international terms, and especially international reception, can never sufficiently explain their potential meaning.

Transnational Latin American Art from 1950 to the Present Day:
1st International Research Forum for Graduate Students and Emerging Scholars

Bernardo Salcedo's Internationalist Double-Speak
Gina McDaniel Tarver

In the early years of his artistic career, Bernardo Salcedo (1939–2007) presented the Colombian art scene with a string of firsts. When Salcedo had his debut as an artist in August 1964 at the Salón Intercol de Arte Joven, held at the Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá (MAMBO), he became known as one of the first Colombian artists to create Pop art. In December 1968—first at MAMBO and then at the Galería Marta Traba in Bogotá—he presented *Autopistas '69* [*Highways '69*], which curator and critic Marta Traba hailed as the first Colombian example of a new kind of “art of invasion”—art that aggressively occupies space previously reserved for the viewer.¹ One year later, at a gallery in Bogotá, he became the first Colombian artist to display raw materials such as dirt, rocks, and hay in an art context with his *Cajas elementales* [*Elemental Boxes*], works that the critic Eduardo Serrano compared to the Earthworks made by artists in the United States. In May of 1970, at the II Bienal de Arte Coltejer in Medellín, Salcedo presented a huge pile of hay-filled bags that was declared the first example of Colombian Conceptual art, and soon thereafter, he became the first Colombian artist to exhibit “written works” (works consisting of words without visual images), which critics also embraced as Conceptual art. In short, from 1964 through the early 1970s, Salcedo established a reputation as a cutting-edge artist who adopted and introduced nationally the latest international trends. What critics often overlooked, however, were the local references

¹ Traba wrote that they represent “el arte de **invasión**” [emphasis in original]. Marta Traba, “Defensa del sí y defensa del no,” *Magazín Dominical* (Bogotá), 8 December 1968, 14.

and implicit critiques of internationalism embedded in these works. Salcedo's "internationalist" works were a form of double-speak: seeming to serve the goal of internationalization—a major goal of the most prominent Colombian art institutions at the time—while attempting to critique and undermine it.

Salcedo emerged as an artist at the height of a push toward internationalization in the visual arts of Colombia. Colombian art institutions, particularly the Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá and the Bienal de Arte Coltejer in Medellín, with the financial sponsorship of big businesses, promoted artistic internationalization as a crucial part of a national program of *desarrollismo*, a program about which Salcedo was deeply skeptical. It was the famous critic and curator Marta Traba, the director of MAMBO and the major proponent of internationalization in Colombia, who discovered and promoted Salcedo's work. At this time in Colombia, internationalization primarily meant the fostering of artistic styles and movements that were in step with, or even derived from, developments in Europe and the United States. Beginning with the Pop collages of the Salón Intercol and continuing in many works throughout his career, Salcedo took an ironic, often mocking approach toward internationalism. This approach allowed him to take advantage of prevailing mood of the Colombian art scene while, at the same time, presenting a critique of some of the impulses that drove the internationalist push. During the early part of his career, he created visual parodies that played on international styles, but that, I argue, ultimately were aimed at local institutions, artistic and otherwise. In this paper, I will closely examine some of Salcedo's "firsts" in order to elucidate Salcedo's conflictive relationship with internationalism.

It is not surprising that Traba was Salcedo's enthusiastic supporter. From the beginning, Traba and the board of directors of MAMBO were committed to exhibiting works by young artists and works in new media. This commitment was essential to the museum's goal of stimulating fresh ideas that could serve to renovate and revitalize the visual arts in the nation's capital and, by extension, in the country, bringing artistic production in Colombia in step with that of the international art world and contributing to the nation's cultural development. Immediately after it began functioning, with the financial support of Intercol (the Colombian subsidiary of Jersey Standard Oil), the museum launched an ambitious educational and exhibition program aimed at educating Colombians about international art.

Throughout the 1960s, extending the local outlook through exhibitions and education about international trends was one of the museum's top priorities. In the 1990s, the artist and art historian Beatriz González recalled that "Marta Traba said that she wouldn't rest until we entered into internationalism."² The idea of "entering into" internationalism is crucial. Throughout most of the 1960s Traba, and others, saw internationalism as something in which Colombia not only should but unproblematically *could* participate. This belief in internationalism was a major factor in the promotion of artists like Salcedo, in whose work Traba saw the creative adaptation of international trends.

The Salón Intercol de Arte Joven, at which Salcedo made his art world debut, was one of MAMBO's first major efforts to promote young artists whose work reflected

² "Marta Traba decía que ella no descansaba hasta que nosotros entráramos en el internacionalismo." González, "Yo no soy una pintora pop." My thanks to Carmen María Jaramillo for drawing my attention to this particular quote.

international trends. It was also the first in a series of competitions for young artists that subsidiaries of Rockefeller-owned Jersey Standard Oil Company (including Intercol) sponsored in eighteen Latin American countries, generally known as the Esso Salons.³ In each case, local art institutions worked with José Gómez-Sicre of the Pan American Union to organize the competition. As Félix Angel notes, “Since it was the only entity in the United States that specialized in Latin American art, the [Pan American Union] was often called on to serve as a consultant to institutions in the United States and abroad.”⁴ But the role of Gómez-Sicre and the Pan American Union in these salons must also be seen as evidence that the oil company’s support of modern Latin American art had political as well as cultural and economic goals, since the Pan American Union was committed officially to supporting the Alliance for Progress—a plan by which the United States would support economic and cultural development throughout the Americas as a means of preventing the spread of communism.⁵ This salon proved to be an important venue for the introduction both of new artists and new, international ideas, styles, media, and techniques into the Colombian art world. Most notably, what was understood as Pop art made its debut in Colombia at this salon with works by Salcedo and three other artists.

A few months previous to the salon’s opening, Traba had discovered Salcedo. He was a young student of architecture and sociology who was experimenting with

³ “Esso” is Jersey Standard Oil’s brand name in Latin America. See Shifra Goldman, *Contemporary Mexican Painting in a Time of Change* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), 33–35.

⁴ Félix Angel, “The Latin American Presence,” in *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States, 1920–1970* (New York: Bronx Museum of the Arts in association with Harry N. Abrams, 1988), 231.

⁵ Pan American Union, Department of Public Information, *The Inter-American System: Its Evolution and Role Today* (Washington, D.C.: Pan American Union, 1963). On the politics of the Esso Salons, see Goldman, *Contemporary Mexican Painting*, 33–35.

assemblage in a studio he had set up in his parents' house. Traba quickly took him under her wing, and it was due to her influence that his works were included in the salon.⁶ But instead of showing the assemblages that had entranced Traba, Salcedo showed two collages. Titled *Mercados para el nuevo arte no. 1 y no. 2* [*Markets for the New Art No. 1 and No. 2*], these were made of product labels and images culled from advertisements along with small objects like packets of gum and cigarettes, matchboxes, and pocket dictionaries. In each collage, Salcedo used found images and objects to form a sort of a cityscape, set against a plain colored background reminiscent of the backgrounds commonly used in print advertisements. The collages are suggestive of the way in which consumerism had altered the face of the urban environment in Colombia. With these works, Salcedo became the first Colombian artist to include advertisements in a work of art.

But these works are not just a reflection of modern urban life, nor are they, as some critics suggested, merely nice experiments in form and composition.⁷ I argue that Salcedo deliberately chose Pop as his style, and collage for his technique, as the best way to make a splash at his debut, in mocking response to Pop's quite recent introduction in his native country as "the collective pictorial movement of greatest importance to have arisen in the recent years."⁸ The artist and art historian Beatriz González, who recently traced early references to Pop art in publications that widely circulated in Colombia,

⁶ María Iovino, *Bernardo Salcedo: El universo encaja* (Bogotá: Biblioteca Luis Angel Arango, Banco de la Republica, 2001), 21.

⁷ Quoted in Iovino, *Bernardo Salcedo*, 22.

⁸ "El movimiento picotrico colectivo de mayor importancia surgido en los últimos años." Alba Lucia Ángel, "Un salon de primavera," *La Nueva Prensa* no. 117 (June 16, 1964), 56.

found that they began in May 1964. One reference, made on June 27 in the periodical *La Nueva Prensa*, gave the following explanation of Pop art:

Pop Art ... is very important in England and USA. The forms it takes are very diverse. Mainly it begins with the use or reproduction of objects of everyday life: posters, signs, bottle labels or caps, rail or road signs, magazine photos added to cigarette packs, doodles, cartoons and "comics."⁹

Salcedo seems almost to have created his collages to illustrate this definition.

Many of the products represented in Salcedo's collages are from the United States (Alka-Seltzer, Marlboro, Kellogg's Rice Krispies, Mazola Corn Oil); some are Colombian (Pielroja cigarettes, Costeña beer). A fragment of a graphic in the second collage shows the Statue of Liberty, probably the most recognized icon of U.S. freedom. The U.S. ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are condensed into the promise of plenty in the form of cheap and readily available goods. Salcedo chose a selection of ads that show that Colombia was not only importing these goods, it was manufacturing them, too. With the collages' titles, Salcedo emphasizes that art, too, is a consumer good.

Though clearly having to do with both consumerism and internationalism, Salcedo's collages issue no clear messages. I believe, however, that the implications of these cityscapes are negative. In the first collage, Salcedo includes the word "Gringo" and a headline that reads "Política Económica de los Países Subdesarrollados" (Economic Politics of Underdeveloped Countries). He also includes a 007 logo: James Bond being,

⁹ "El Pop Art ... tiene un carácter muy activo en Inglaterra y en USA. Sus formas son muy diversas. Principalmente parte de la utilización o reproducción de los objetos de la vida corriente: afiches, carteles, etiquetas o cápsulas de botellas, señales ferroviarias o camineras, fotos de revistas agregadas a paquetes de cigarrillos, monos, caricaturas y 'comics.'" From *La Nueva Prensa*, June 27, 1964, as quoted in Beatriz González, "Andy Warhol y la recepción del arte pop en Colombia," in *Andy Warhol: Mr. America* (Bogotá: Biblioteca Luis Angel Arango, Banco de la República, 2009).

of course, the international man of espionage—a reference not only to American movies and their popularity in Colombia but to First World secret agents acting in Third World countries to protect First World interests.¹⁰ Also incorporated in the same collage is a packet of Pielroja cigarettes, with its Indian head logo. Beneath it and contiguous is the word *Revolución*, so that the word is clearly associated with the Americas. The word is incorporated in the other collage, too, directly under the image of a watch, to create a play on words. The idea of revolution, absorbed into advertising as a brand name, seems to have become nothing more than another trendy marketing possibility.¹¹ Given his references to “economic politics,” to the penetration of the United States in Colombia, especially in terms of consumer goods, and to revolution, I believe he created these collages especially for the Salón Intercol, with full knowledge of the intricate connections between Intercol, the Pan American Union, the Alliance for Progress, and the political and economic interests of the United States.

After the Salón Intercol, Salcedo’s career took off, in large part thanks to Traba. Traba featured Salcedo’s work with that of one other young artist at MAMBO in 1965, and the following year, she gave him his first solo show there with an exhibition of his assemblages known as *Cajas blancas* [*White Boxes*]. With Traba’s support, he continued

¹⁰ In 1964, *Doctor No* was showing in Bogotá, as noted in *La Nueva Prensa* (Bogotá), no. 119 (4 July 1964): 54. The reviewer in *La Nueva Prensa* called it “atrocious adverturerism.”

¹¹ Cf. Iovino, *Bernardo Salcedo*, 22–23. Iovino sees little if any significance in the content of these collages. She argues that, fundamentally, they are about an appreciation of the expressive potentials of graphics and design associated with consumerism. She wrote, “Therefore, the results they offer are purely visual, product of an uncritical take on the resources of the language [of consumerism].” (“Por lo tanto, los resultados que ofrecen son puramente visuales, producto de una toma acrítica de los recursos del lenguaje.”) Iovino illustrated these two works in her retrospective catalog on Salcedo, though they were not included in the show.

to adapt new international trends, as with his *Autopistas '69*, another solo show at MAMBO held in December 1968. Here he presented an art that came off the wall to interrupt the space of the viewer. Furthermore, he invited the viewer to interact with the art in new ways by creating hinged pieces that the viewer could open, close, and otherwise move. The exhibition poster invited the viewer-participant to “Press the boxes ... exciting! ... ooh!”¹²

In a review of the exhibition, Traba called these works examples of an art of “invasion” or “aggression” in that they irrupt into “conventional spaces where man lives, and burst into them with an intrepid and possessive insolence.”¹³ She placed them in a context that was wider than Colombia by comparing his invasive approach to that of Judd or “so many English [artists]” (while still naming Pop, as well, as something he mixes into his art).¹⁴ She argued that it does not matter that Judd or others might have practiced

¹² “Oprima las cajas ... excitante! ... ooh!” Bernardo Salcedo, *Salcedo '69* (Bogotá: Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá, 1968). A small picture of this exhibition brochure/poster appears in Iovino, *Bernardo Salcedo*, 190.

¹³ They represent “el arte de **invasión** o de **agresión** a los espacios convencionales donde vive el hombre, e irrumpido en ellos con una insolencia intrépida y posesiva” [emphasis in original]. Marta Traba, “Defensa del sí y defensa del no,” *Magazín Dominical* (Bogotá), 8 December 1968, 14.

¹⁴ “No me importa que Judd o tantos ingleses hayan practicado antes el arte de invasión o de agresión...” Traba, “Defensa del sí.” It is interesting that Traba chose to compare these works to Judd’s sculptures. Perhaps this choice was based on a similarity in terms of pristine look and box-like structure. Another possible comparison would be with Robert Rauschenberg’s combine paintings, especially *Wall Street*, 1961, which also invades the viewer’s space and which treats a subject similar to that of Salcedo’s “Autopistas” (it includes part of a traffic barrier, nailed to and sticking out from the canvas). This particular work may have been known to Salcedo as it was reproduced in *Studio International* 175 (April 1968): 190. Salcedo is known to have admired Rauschenberg’s work.

invasive art first: “Salcedo, by way of a fresh conception and full of talent, is always the first to adapt these situations to Colombian art.”¹⁵

What Traba did not delve into is how Salcedo used new formal approaches to address the Colombian situation: as was typical of her criticism at the time, her assessment maintained a level of universality. Traba mentioned that Salcedo “includes objects that come out of daily life”; she did not, however, examine what these objects (“service stations, oil cans, cars, and roads”) might mean within the Colombian context. What was important to her is that they lose “their function, becoming a useless and satirical game,” that the exhibition “ratifies his position of assault that he maintains within national art.”¹⁶

Salcedo, though, had Colombian reality, and a Colombian audience, clearly in mind with *Autopistas '69*. The titles he gave to several of the works, referring to newspaper headlines and political slogans, make this clear: “*Better roads will transform Colombia*,” “*Pardon the inconvenience that this construction may cause, WE ARE WORKING FOR YOU*,” and 2nd *Yellow Dream of the Taxi Driver Drowned in “El Salitre”—There Wasn’t a Signal*.¹⁷ This last title refers to a recent deadly traffic accident,

¹⁵ “Salcedo siempre el primero que adapta estas situaciones al arte colombiano, mediante una concepción fresca y llena de talento.” Traba, “Defensa del sí.”

¹⁶ “Su nueva muestra en el Museo de Arte Moderno, mezcla de pop radiante, construcciones invasoras y divertidas, inclusiones de objetos que salen de la vida cotidiana (estaciones de servicio, aceiteras, carros, caminos), para perder su función y convertirse en inútil y satírico juego, ratifica el puesto de asalto que mantiene en el arte nacional.” Ibid. To clarify, the objects that Salcedo included, in these works, were often small-scale models or constructions representing the things that Traba mentions (the service stations, cars, and highways), not the things themselves.

¹⁷ “*Mejores vías transforman a Colombia*,” “*Excúsenos la incomodidad que le pueda causar esta obra, TRABAJAMOS PARA UD*,” and 2^o *sueño amarillo del taxista ahogado en “El Salitre”—no había señal*. These titles are listed on the brochure/poster for the exhibition. See Salcedo, *Salcedo '69*.

covered in the daily newspapers; it suggests that perhaps the slogans that provide the other titles have little meaning, since much of the city was still without traffic signals. Salcedo refers to new roads—signs of modernization, signs that government institutions are working for the benefit of the people—but it is a modernization that is incomplete and that fails to keep its promises.

Salcedo introduced another kind of work altogether at the Galería San Diego in Bogotá one year later in December 1969. With his *Cajas elementales*, Salcedo took the tension, present in all of his work, between transcendent aesthetic art object and contingent, contextually meaningful, banal material to a new extreme. The materials he used in this series—including rocks, dirt, hay, dry rice, dry beans—were new to his work (indeed, new to Colombian art).¹⁸ He returned to white as a unifying element and to a contained, rather than invasive, composition; in great contrast to the works in *Autopistas* '69, these boxes are his most austere and closed works.

Since many works in this new series, to an even greater degree than Salcedo's works before, have strong morphological similarities to the very latest trends then emerging in Europe and the United States, they fit nicely into Colombian institutional strategies for internationalization. Those that use raw materials from the earth particularly are comparable to many works from 1967 onward commonly categorized as Arte Povera and Earthworks.¹⁹ Typically, the similarities did not go unnoticed. For example, Eduardo

¹⁸ The artist Tiberio Vanegas used materials like sand to make sculptures in 1961 (see above, n. 15), but he did not leave them in a raw state like Salcedo did, instead transforming them into more conventional sculpture.

¹⁹ Precedence may be traced back even further, of course. There is, for example, Rauschenberg's *Dirt Painting: For John Cage* (1952–1953), consisting of dirt and mold in a wooden frame. For an illustration of this work and a discussion of early uses of natural, earthen materials, see Suzaan Boettger, *Earthworks: Art and Landscape of the*

Serrano wrote: “the use of certain elements in these landscape boxes bring his work close to the ‘earth works’ of the North Americans...”²⁰ It is likely that Salcedo knew of such works, either by word of mouth or through international art journals wherein the works were discussed and images of them reproduced.

Yet despite the similarities and the possibility that he took inspiration, at least in terms of material, from foreign art, Salcedo’s *Cajas elementales* relate closely to his own previous work and differ significantly from foreign works, in large part because of the way they so adroitly relate to their local context. If, upon first encountering these boxes, the viewer thought of contemporary international art, or Salcedo’s previous *Cajas blancas*, reading the titles of many of the works would add yet another layer of reference. Many of the titles refer to current events reported in Colombia’s daily newspapers, especially to recent developments in the government’s agrarian reforms. In Salcedo’s *Cajas elementales* the titles are a blatant link to an extra-artistic environment, one that is specifically Colombian.

The uniform treatment of the elements on display in the *Cajas elementales* is, in effect, similar to the coating of white paint that homogenizes and aestheticizes the fragmentary objects in his *Cajas blancas*. Yet there is a difference, too, since Salcedo

Sixties (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2002), 24–26.

²⁰ “...la utilización de ciertos elementos en estas cajas paisaje de Salcedo acerca su obra a los trabajos ‘earth’ (de tierra) de los norteamericanos...” Eduardo Serrano, “Las cajas de Bernardo Salcedo,” *Lecturas Dominicales* (Bogotá), 28 December 1969, 4. Iovino, in her retrospective catalogue (*Bernardo Salcedo*, 25–26), wrote, “From a theoretical and informative perspective, Salcedo must have been connected with the tendencies of *arte povera* and others like process art, that reaffirmed the documentary and expressive value of current and degradable materials.” (“Desde una perspectiva teórica e informativa Salcedo debió estar conectado con las tendencias del *arte povera* y de otras como el process art, que reafirmaban el valor documental y expresivo de los materiales corrientes y degradables.”)

preserves the materials' original colors and textures in this series. As the curator María Iovino wrote: "The fact that the objects lose their finish or make-up and gain individual life entails Salcedo's rapid learning about what objects *per se* can offer artistically, from their narrative capacity as witnesses and participants in the world in which they are articulated as signifiers."²¹ The elements Salcedo shows without "make-up" in this series are mostly "witnesses and participants" in the agricultural world that is the mainstay of Colombia's economy. Whereas the elements imply agriculture, the titles—typically humorous—of the works into which they are incorporated make the reference explicit. For example, *Caja Agraria* [*Agricultural Box*] is a play on words since *caja* means box but also fund or bank. In Colombia, the Caja de Crédito Agrario, Industrial y Minero (Bank of Agricultural, Industrial, and Mining Credit), more commonly known as the Caja Agraria, is a state bank that was established in 1931. One of the bank's main purposes is to grant long-term loans to small farmers, though they also buy land for resale and promote economic development, in general.²² Salcedo's work of that name pointedly suggests the ineffectiveness of that bank's role in helping small farmers: The *caja* is filled with nothing more than dirt and straw, which itself denotes lack of value. The box also brings to mind the saying that something is *pura paja* (literally "pure straw"), meaning full of fluff and essentially meaningless (similar to "bullshit" in English).

²¹ "El hecho de que los objetos pierdan acabados o maquillaje y ganen vida individual supone un rápido aprendizaje de Salcedo de los que los objetos *per se* pueden ofrecer artísticamente, de su capacidad narrativa como testigos y partícipes del mundo en el que se les articula como significantes." Iovino, *Bernardo Salcedo*, 27.

²² This brief description is paraphrased from Robert H. Davis, *Historical Dictionary of Colombia* 2nd ed., Latin American Historical Dictionaries, no. 23 (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 107.

Another work, *Minifundio*, makes a similar joke about the state of agriculture in Colombia. A *minifundio* is a small farm, typically held by a poor farmer, dedicated to subsistence agriculture. It is the opposite of a *latifundio*, a large estate geared towards producing commodities for export. Typically during the twentieth century, the *latifundistas*, with the tacit support of the government, absorbed smaller farms, displacing the poor farmer. In the late 1960s President Carlos Lleras Restrepo initiated reforms aimed at resolving Colombia's land problems, but by the end of his term in 1969, it was becoming apparent that his reforms themselves were *pura paja*—as widely discussed in the mass media. *Minifundio* suggests just how little land in Colombia was left, in the late 1960s, to the small farmer, and how inadequate this land was in supporting those who owned it. The size of this earth-filled box (the display area is about half a foot square) amusingly exaggerates the meagerness of the small farm. Once more, Salcedo aims his humor against institutions. In this case, his target is institutionalized agriculture and, by implication, the national government, with its ineffective push under Lleras Restrepo for agricultural reform.

Salcedo would revisit this theme in a form that was, again, radically new in Colombia when he created *Hectárea de heno* [*Hectare of Hay*] for the II Bienal de Arte Coltejer, held in Medellín in May 1970. For this piece, Salcedo filled a great many bushel-sized plastic sacks with hay, numbered them non-sequentially, and heaped them into a huge pile on the floor of a gallery at the biennial. According to the artist, the work—which is now legendary in Colombia as the first example of Colombian Conceptual art—represented one hectare of hay packaged; thus the title is a

straightforward description of the physical content of the piece.²³ Though cryptic, *Hectárea* had an immediate sensory impact. Visually, its size and configuration were striking: it filled an entire gallery, dwarfing the viewer, while the careless arrangement of the standard-sized bags set up a play between regularity and disorder.

Hectárea looks quite similar to many piles that appeared on the international art scene in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Its title, too, sounds like the title of such works. Yet Salcedo requested, and was granted, the placement of the work in a gallery adjacent to realist painting, away from examples of the latest international trends that were included as part of the biennial.²⁴ Whereas *Hectárea* could be seen to fit perfectly within contemporary international art, it could not have fit comfortably next to realist painting in the biennial, but with its placement, it seems that Salcedo was insisting that *Hectárea* be “read” in another context, as part of another artistic trajectory. It is through the material of *Hectárea* that possible readings open up having little to do with international art. With *Hectárea* Salcedo continued the exploration of the ways in which even the most banal materials presented nakedly can act as “articulated signifiers” of the Colombian context. The rationalism and “progress” of modernization, especially in the context of Colombian agricultural reform and its failures, should be seen as the primary target of Salcedo’s work. The work’s allusions, through material, to the agrarian situation would have been reinforced by *Hectárea*’s title, since “hectare” was a term used frequently in the press in

²³ “‘What does your work mean?’ everyone asked. And [Salcedo] tranquilly responded: ‘Nothing, it’s a hectare packaged.’” (“¿Qué significa su obra?—preguntaban todos. Y [Salcedo] respondió tranquilo: —Nada, es una hectárea empacada.”)

Amparo Pérez Camargo, “Lo de Salcedo es ‘Pura Paja,’” *La República* (Bogotá), 3 May 1970, sec. A, p. 10; republished in Iovino, *Bernardo Salcedo*, 192.

²⁴ Iovino, *Bernardo Salcedo*, 30, n. 17.

relation to the recently failed national land reform programs.²⁵ In this light, *Hectárea* could be seen as revealing, simultaneously, a program for artistic development through internationalization that makes for an uncomfortable fit as well as a program for agricultural rationalization in disorder.

A letter that Salcedo wrote to Leonel Estrada, the biennial's director, on the occasion of the III Bienal de Arte Coltejer in 1972 provides a particularly lucid criticism of the nationalist rhetoric, that of *desarollismo*, which Coltejer used to explain their biennial and which was behind the drive for internationalism in the arts in Colombia, in general. It is a condemnation of the narrow nationalism behind internationalism. Despite Salcedo's rejection of the prevailing internationalism in the arts (which he considered cultural imperialism), and of nationalist strategies for social-cultural-economic development, he believed in the value of biennial, as his letter makes clear.

This combative statement, which is perhaps the closest thing to a manifesto Salcedo ever produced, celebrates what must be seen as the failure, in terms of its stated and assumed goals, of the biennial. He declared, "I don't believe in the Biennial as a national shield nor as a political instrument of the dominant classes."²⁶ He diplomatically absolved biennial's managers of sin since they were "working in good faith" to follow deceitful strategies developed by politicians, which the former truly believed would

²⁵ Miguel González affirms, "Agrarian Fund, Fund for Family Compensation, or hectare are terms related to national reforms and programs." ("Caja agraria, Caja de Compensación Familiar o hectárea, son términos relacionados con reformas y programas nacionales.") González, "Salcedo no en-caja," *Arte en Colombia*, no. 15 (June 1981): 35.

²⁶ "No creo en la Bienal como un escudo patrio ni como un instrumento político de la clase dominante." Bernardo Salcedo, letter to Leonel Estrada, III Bienal de Arte Coltejer, Medellín, 1972; as published in Iovino, *Bernardo Salcedo*, 162.

improve the lives of Colombians. So, he asks and then answers, “Why am I with the Biennial?”:

Could it be because I see an approximation to the healthy and slow economic and social development policy that the Antioquean directors of industry have implemented? No, indeed the Biennial, although it is the fruit of that slow, deceptive development policy, is apart from it due to its informal, anti-dogmatic, anti-theoretical character, and even in the face of the utopian didactic character that you have wanted to give it as the only way out when the severe question is asked, “What purpose does the Biennial serve”....²⁷

Due to the openness of the biennial’s directors, on the one hand, and to the very nature of the works of art included in the biennial, on the other, Salcedo believed that the exhibition was not actually what its directors intended it to be, or justified it as being:

You, it seems to me, are convinced that with the Biennial you are competing with [former Colombian president] Carlos Lleras in reforms, capacity to work, and discoveries, but no! ... Don’t deceive yourself, I repeat: The Biennial is a horse of a different color, of my color, of the color of all those of us who are not interested in the national country, nor in the legal battle over borders with Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Venezuela; it belongs to those of us who long ago erased, with a good eraser, all borders and all that is left to us is our hands, that and nothing more.²⁸

Salcedo believed that artists create without concern for national borders, and furthermore that they are not concerned with wielding power—unlike institutions—and thus produce organically, flexibly, spontaneously, without the intent of controlling the public:

I do not, as you see, have the power in my hand. That power that official

²⁷ “¿Será porque veo una aproximación al sano y lento desarrollismo económico y social que plantean las directivas antioqueñas de la industria? No, precisamente la Bienal, aunque es fruto de eso lento desarrollismo mentiroso, está por fuera de él debido a su carácter informal, antidogmático, antiteórico, y aún ante el utópico carácter didáctico que ustedes han querido darle como única salida a la pregunta de rigor, ‘Para qué sirve la Bienal’....” Ibid., 163.

²⁸ “Usted, me parece, está convencido de que con la Bienal está compitiendo con Carlos Lleras en reformas, capacidad de trabajo y descubrimientos, ¿pero no! ... no se engañe, le repito: la Bienal es harina de otro costal de mi costal, del costal de todos los que no nos interesa el país nacional, ni el litigio de límites con Ecuador, Perú, Brasil, Venezuela; sino de los que hace tiempo borramos con un buen borrador todo límite y sólo nos quedaron las manos, ahí y no más.” Ibid.

functionaries use so as not to see what is born, what simply comes forth without the necessity of creative strategies or four-year plans. Because nothing leaves bureaucrats nor is conceived by them without strategy....

I am not a creator of culture. Nothing of the sort! You are not either, that is what's important here.²⁹

The biennial, to Salcedo, was important because it did not, as its directors might wish, have power. It was *not* important for the business strategies that led to its organization. Rather, it meant something because it allowed for artists to work tactically (without “the necessity of creative strategies” but organically, i.e. in agreement with the character of circumstances).

The following year, in 1973, Salcedo effectively extended his critique of the nationalist institutional goals of biennials to the Bienal Americana de Artes Gráficas in Cali with his contribution to that exhibition. *Primera lección* [*First Lesson*] deconstructs the Colombian national shield, highlighting the paucity of a prominent symbol of nationalism while also implicating, as he had with earlier works, both the national system of education and the attempts of biennials to educate the public. At the same time, taking on a national symbol as a theme was itself a rejection of internationalism as defined by the artistic mainstream—as something free from a specific context. Salcedo's work may be read as positing that this rejection is the real first lesson that needs to be learned, by the public but especially by the art institutions. For Salcedo, neither mainstream internationalism nor nationalism had a place in Colombian art. Instead, art must be rooted in a local context without being nationalistic; and it can ignore borders and therefore

²⁹ “No estoy, como ves, con el poder en la mano. Con ese poder que los funcionarios oficiales utilizan para no ver lo que nace, lo que sale simplemente sin la necesidad de las estrategias creativas o de [los] planes cuatrienales. Porque a los burócratas no les sale nada ni conciben nada sin la estrategia No soy un hacedor de cultura. ¡Qué va! Ustedes tampoco, ahí está lo importante.” Ibid., 162.

might cross them, but only within the limitations of shared linguistic and cultural concerns, by creating a regional Latin Americanism.

In cases of artists such as Salcedo, who so adroitly mined international artistic languages, it is impossible to approach Latin American art and its history without careful consideration of external points of contact. For many artists, the international art circuit—as established through museum and biennial exhibitions and specialized journals that were vehicles of art criticism—was an unavoidable frame of reference and a potentially powerful tool. Salcedo, among other artists, took advantage of the circuit whenever possible, presenting a kind of coded double-speak with works that flouted their international look while addressing specifically local concerns. Because local concerns are central to these works, however, approaching them through the lens of internationalism can only be a beginning; international terms, and especially international reception, can never sufficiently explain their potential meaning.

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In this paper I would like to like to explore Walter Mignolo's notion of border-thinking and to try to establish a clear relationship between his geopolitical thinking and art historical examination and methodologies. The intention behind this writing, and thinking, exercise will be to highlight certain problems that I, as a Latin American Art student from Latin America, associate with decontextualized, outsider, research and appreciation of Latin American Art. In order to explain the pertinence of Mignolo's thinking, I will focus on the exhibition *Displaced: Contemporary Art from Colombia* and particularly in the controversy created by the removal of Wilson Diaz's video *Rebeldes del Sur* from the show. It will be my intention to present, simultaneously, two of the most extreme reactions to the exhibition and its dilemmas: on the one hand, I will present a case for the removal of the work as stated by the Colombian authorities and a vast majority of Colombia's population (grounded on valid concerns regarding the image of the country, as well as the status of the illegal groups depicted by the video). On the other, I will expose the arguments of the Colombian artistic circle, as well as a vast majority of international observers, who adamantly condemn the removal of the work (this governmental action seen as a direct attack on artistic freedom and freedom of speech at large). I will argue that in order to fully appreciate Diaz's poignant commentary (on both Colombian society and the perception of the Colombian conflict overseas), we must locate our perception in between these geocultural reactions, always paying attention to both sides while never taking sides nor disregarding other opinions. In this sense, and by exposing the simultaneous yet contradictory reactions to a particular exhibition, I will try to locate my research in a double position, one that advocates for a "diatopical hermeneutics"¹, a simultaneous exegesis of a cultural product carried out from different zones of cultural enunciation with different topographical (geographical) realities that determine a particular mode of understanding the concerns highlighted by *Displaced*.

One of the most important motivations behind this exercise is to respond to a series of interpretations from "outside" researchers of the problematics created by *Displaced* and particularly by *Rebeldes del Sur*. I have been fortunate to speak to people from different parts of the world about Diaz's video. In many debates and discussions, I had the impression that outsiders simply regarded the removal of as an act of state censorship. In this scenario, the "bad guys" are the Colombian government, the Colombian Embassy in London as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. To me, this interpretation lacks an understanding of how many Colombians react to FARC, a group that has constantly affected the lives of an entire country through violent attacks and terrorist threats. Under the gaze of "state censorship", the intricate and complex inner panorama of the reality of the Colombian conflict is flattened since none of the voices of a vast majority of Colombians are not being represented. Most of Colombia rejects FARC. Most of Colombia refuses to boast the name of a revolutionary group that has caused so many deaths for so many years. In my household, for example, when I talked about the video the response was quite clear, utter and total rejection of the piece and complete support for the removal of the video. It is my intention to bring into the forefront the concerns of those Colombian voices who were not heard, or simply

¹ Defined by Mignolo as: "the required method of interpretation when the distance to overcome, needed for any understanding, is not just a distance within one single culture (morphological hermeneutics), or a temporal one (diachronic hermeneutics), but rather the distance between two (or more) cultures, which have independently developed in different spaces (topoi) their own methods of philosophizing [...] and ways of reading intelligibility along with their proper categories." MIGNOLO, Walter. Afterword: Human Understanding and (Latin) American Interests -- The Politics and Sensibilities of Geocultural Locations. In: *Poetics Today*, Vol. 16, No. 1. *Loci of Enunciation and Imaginary Constructions: The Case of (Latin) America*, II. (Spring, 1995), p. 178-179.

disregarded as conservative, or “against art”. In this paper my objective will be to give the same importance to those who agreed and those who disagreed with the video’s removal in order to expose the contradictory and complex nature of Colombian reality for the rest of the world.

Two years ago, the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery in Swansea, Wales, hosted *Displaced: Contemporary Art from Colombia*, the “first major exhibition of contemporary art practice from Colombia in the United Kingdom.”² The show featured the work of 15 Colombian artists who used a wide variety of mediums, from painting to photography, from sculpture to installation, from printmaking to video. The roster of participating artists included well established figures, in both the Colombian and international art scene, as well as emerging names articulated through “themes of migration and notions of place”³. The exhibition, curated by Karen MacKinnon and María Clara Bernal, centered on notions such as “‘place’ and ‘belonging’, against a backdrop of local and global displacement which disrupts our sense of self, our identity.”⁴ Within this conceptual framework the show explored the reality of Colombia always paying attention to issues such as internal displacement, its causes and its consequences. At the same time, the exhibition paid close attention to transnational migration and tried to investigate the ensuing problems of displacement, for both the migrant and its new host country. It is important to say that *Displaced* was articulated as double hinge where relevant issues concerning Colombia’s national identity were always treated from a Colombian perspective and also from an international gaze upon Colombia.

In Colombia, internal displacement is one of the biggest and most important consequences of the ongoing internal conflict between the government and a myriad of armed guerrilla forces who operate outside of the law. As such, it would be irresponsible to put on an exhibition that investigates contemporary Colombian society without paying attention to the violent war waged in the mountains and jungles of Colombia. The inclusion of Wilson Díaz’s *Rebeldes del Sur*, responds to this necessity to anchor the current problems of the country to a historical, and at the same time contemporary, source.

In October of 2007, Wilson Díaz’s video “*Rebeldes del Sur*” (2002) was removed from the exhibition by the Cultural Attaché of the Colombian Embassy in London, Edwin Ostos. The work in question features two videos of a band of musicians dressed in army camouflage singing two different songs in Spanish. The first performance was captured indoors, at what seems to be a private party. They sing about love for a beautiful woman while the audience dances passionately. One of the members of the band holds an AK-47, and while singing along with the music, sways back and forth as if his rifle were his dance partner; at some points he even treats it as a guitar. The second performance was documented at an outdoors festival; the band was located underneath a tent sponsored by a very popular brand of Colombian beer. This time the song is not about love but about violence and war; abuse, paramilitary forces and the government. The combination of lyrics, camouflage and logos makes it clear that the band performing belongs to FARC, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, the largest active Guerrilla Group in Latin América. The video, shot with a rustic handheld camera, was filmed in San Vicente del Caguán, a small rural town located in the department of Caquetá during Andrés Pastrana’s infamous presidential term (1998-2002). During this time Pastrana invited intellectuals, artists, reporters and civilians to the “Zona de Distención” (an area of the size of Switzerland where military operations were suspended in order to attempt to engage in peace dialogues with FARC) and encouraged them to

² <http://www.swansea.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=10435>

³ <http://www.swansea.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=10435>

⁴ <http://www.wai.org.uk/index.cfm?UUID=8750C706-65BF-7E43-3238816C8F173794>

participate, document and observe the activities taking place in this unprotected strip of Colombian territory. Wilson Díaz was one of the artists that accepted this invitation.

Almost two years ago, upon the withdrawal of “Rebeldes del Sur”, the Colombian artworld engaged in one of the most interesting debates in its recent history. Issues of censorship, morality, freedom of speech, resistance and commitment reverberate in the dialogue between artists, art historians and curators, on one hand, and society at large, on the other. To some, mainly involved in the Colombian artistic scene, it was evident that Wilson Díaz’s video was a victim of State enforced censorship. To others, mainly members of the Colombian political and civilian society, the work was rightfully excluded due to its propagandistic nature. In the texts below I will try to present a summary of each side’s argument as if delivered by a spokesperson for each camp. The voice on the left explores the reasons for the withdrawal from the point of view of the Colombian authorities. The voice on the right presents the reasons for calling such an act “censorship”. This is not a simple case and my aim is to be as even handed as possible so that the viewer will make up his or her own mind regarding the importance, consequences and relevance of “Rebeldes del Sur” once he or she has acquired the contextual tools that allow for a clearer interpretation of the piece. The debate is by no means finished.

Colombia has been in a state of “internal conflict” for the past 50 years. The main protagonists of this cruel war are clear: FARC and the Army. The stage for this circus of death is evident: the jungles, small towns and cities of Colombia. The strategy is clear: kill or be killed.

According to the Resource Center for Conflict Analysis (Centro de Recursos para el Análisis de Conflictos), CERAC, between 1988 and 2005 over 6000 people were killed by FARC, the vast majority of casualties being civilians. Unsatisfied with this result, FARC have been responsible for the majority of the country’s kidnappings, including an airplane hijack, massive residential abductions, and the seizure of a presidential candidate, Ingrid Betancourt. Under the banner of radical left-wing militancy, this Narco-Terrorist group has successfully challenged state authority through gruesome massacres and cruel ambushes financed by the most profitable business in the world: drug trafficking. FARC brings nothing but pain and sorrow to Colombia. By recruiting younger and younger soldiers they

I first heard of the forced displacement of “Rebeldes del Sur” in Bogotá. María Clara Bernal (co-curator of the exhibition) explained the incident with the embassy and then showed us the video. 11:06 minutes later I felt outraged and scared. I was furious because the video, an artistic production, was removed from one of the most important exhibitions for Contemporary Colombian Art by the Colombian Government, and frightened by what, clearly, had been an instance of censorship by the State. The Colombian government, while complaining about the eradication of private news channels in Venezuela, acted in a very similar way to Chavez’s growing totalitarian regime. Censorship, the systematic elimination of cultural products opposed to a ruling ideology, must be condemned in all its forms, whether it be the suppression of a chapter in a book or the withdrawal of a work of art. Carlos Medellín, ambassador to the United Kingdom at the time, argued that the piece was an apologetic rendition of a terrorist movement and therefore, could not be

ravage the future of the country; their landmines always amputating our capability to move forward.

Given these circumstances it is clear why, as a country, we must reject and condemn any activity that promotes, directly or indirectly, FARC. In these troubled times, framed by our geopolitical situation in Latin America, we must be clear in our stance against the insurgents; the fate of our nation depends on it. It is in this light that I support the withdrawal of Wilson Díaz's "Los Rebeldes del Sur". How could we, as principal victims of the conflict, not act this way? Are we supposed to accept a piece of FARC propaganda disguised as a work of art? Are we going to let the image of Colombia be tainted and obscured by a video that clearly exalts this group? How could we not reject such a piece? I understand that one of the most important characteristics of a democracy is freedom of speech, but at what cost? If, let's say, an artist decided to make a bronze cast of FARC's recently deceased leader Manuel Marulanda Velez, Tirofijo, and intended to replace Simon Bolivar's statue in Bogotá's central square, should we accept this intervention? Should it be financed by the state? Should we glorify one of the biggest murderers in our recent history? My answer is clear: No.

As one of the pieces in "Displaced: Contemporary Art from Colombia", hosted by the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery in Swansea, Wales, "Rebeldes del Sur" exports FARC's anti-governmental and violent campaign. It is a clear attack on Colombia's international reputation; it implies that Colombia is a country controlled by these forces, a complacent country that boasts and accepts armed groups outside of the law. In more than one sense, this video represents a great danger to the political stability of our country; a stability grounded on communal rejection of such groups. We cannot allow such messages to be sent to the international community. This video does not represent us.

exhibited in a show sponsored by the Colombian Government through the Ministry of Exterior Relations. By doing so, it not only violated an academic project carried out by renowned scholars in the field of Contemporary Art, it also acted against one of the principal tenements of a democracy: freedom of speech. As Colombian artist Alberto Baraya argues; "The consequences of a small act of censorship will be, without a doubt, another act of censorship, and then another and then another."

As a Colombian, I condemn the removal of "Rebeldes del Sur". It is a violent, disrespectful and obtuse act. It denies opposition, discourages dialogue; it imposes homogenization under one ideological banner. How can I, as a Colombian, trust a hypocritical government that proclaims freedom, debate and dialogue, and at the same time silences a work of art? In a time of increasing conservative ideology, we must be wary of how our leaders exercise their power. We must be vigilant and speak up when repression starts to knock on our doors. This could only be the beginning.

And yet, what saddens me the most is that the hostility towards the work of art demonstrated by the Colombian authorities reveals a broader tendency of dehumanization of the enemy, in this case FARC soldiers. Many Colombians refuse to accept that a "guerrillero" can dance, sing, cry and breathe because it threatens the comfort offered by having a faceless enemy. Through its very neutrality "Los Rebeldes del Sur" uncovers the hidden face of the internal conflict by revealing the humanity behind a man holding an AK-47. As a society, we have forgotten that the FARC is composed of people who are, in many ways, very similar to us. We have been anesthetized by the image of an abstract enemy. "Los Rebeldes del Sur" remind us that *they* also have a name, fears and desires. That *they* like to dance and sing about a lost love, just like us.

REDES, SITUACIONES Y LUGARES EN EL ARTE CHILENO.

Paulina Varas Alarcón

SUMMARY

My proposal is based about the circulation international strategies's analysis in some episodes of the Chilean visual arts between 60s and 80s.

I will deepen in three concepts that determine contexts as action forms, to report circulation strategies and its different international inscriptions: *Network(s), Situation(s) and Place(s)*

1- The postal art network of the Chilean artist Guillermo Deisler from 60s:

The Guillermo Deisler's circulation strategies within the framework of the South American Postal Art network during 60s - extended towards different countries from 60s - define and develop an idea of artistic network that allows approaching the circulation of Deisler's work from different forms. This disposition is a program that tied the publishing aspect and the graphical techniques.

2- The intervention of the Chilean artist Cecilia Vicuña in the first activities of the association for Artist created Democracy in 70s in London.

Cecilia Vicuña, as collaborator in *Artist for Democracy*, marks a way to relate the Chilean cultural context of the Military Dictatorship with the different manifestations support of the artists and people from support from outside Chile towards who began to live in a context of political repression. The strategies of circulation are defined from Situation that it re-marks a political temporality.

3- The circulation strategies of the Actions Art Group (C.A.D.A.) in local and international contexts in 80s.

The C.A.D.A. makes a series of interventions on the public space of the city, to show its political and cultural opposition. These are constructing problematic aspects of our country from re-think the place of these practices in the Military Dictatorship's cultural framework. From a series

of residual gestures that re-register the relation of object and political subject.

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SUMMARY

My proposal is based about the circulation international strategies's analysis in some episodes of the Chilean visual arts between 60s and 80s.

I will deepen in three concepts that determine contexts as action forms, to report circulation strategies and its different international inscriptions: *Network(s), Situation(s) and Place(s)*

1- The postal art network of the Chilean artist Guillermo Deisler from 60s:

The Guillermo Deisler's circulation strategies within the framework of the South American Postal Art network during 60s - extended towards different countries from 60s - define and develop an idea of artistic network that allows approaching the circulation of Deisler's work from different forms. This disposition is a program that tied the publishing aspect and the graphical techniques.

2- The intervention of the Chilean artist Cecilia Vicuña in the first activities of the association for Artist created Democracy in 70s in London.

Cecilia Vicuña, as collaborator in *Artist for Democracy*, marks a way to relate the Chilean cultural context of the Military Dictatorship with the different manifestations support of the artists and people from support from outside Chile towards who began to live in a context of political repression. The strategies of circulation are defined from Situation that it re-marks a political temporality.

3- The circulation strategies of the Actions Art Group (C.A.D.A.) in local and international contexts in 80s.

The C.A.D.A. makes a series of interventions on the public space of the city, to show its political and cultural opposition. These are constructing problematic aspects of our country from re-think the place of these practices in the Military Dictatorship's cultural framework. From a series of residual gestures that re-register the relation of object and political subject.

*Hay alientos, preocupaciones, problemas,
decisiones y angustias, que laten en ciertos escritos
y en ciertas obras, invitándonos a lecturas capaces
de retomar lo dicho como materia de futuras elaboraciones.*

Colectivo Situaciones¹

Mi propuesta se basa en analizar tres episodios del arte chileno a partir de tres archivos que contienen sus registros y que encuadran distintas formas de entender las prácticas artísticas relacionadas con su potencial político. Cada una de ellas expresa diferentes modos y estrategias tanto de circulación como de activación de la coyuntura situacional donde están enmarcadas. No se trata sólo de una vuelta histórica sobre los archivos que contienen dichas prácticas, sino de intencionar una mirada sobre sus modelos de trabajo, con la finalidad de proponer que la memoria de ellas permite re-pensar el potencial y latencia de las prácticas contemporáneas. También planteo que estos episodios problematizan el contexto actual del arte contemporáneo en Chile, en su relación con lo político y lo colectivo, a partir de la activación de la memoria y la *calidad de la experiencia*,² como prácticas que enuncian estrategias de colaboración, colectivización y afecciones comunes.

RED(ES) o POESÍA EN CIRCULACIÓN³

Las propuestas del artista chileno Guillermo Deisler en el marco de la red de Arte Postal Sudamericana, que comienza en los años 60s -extendida también hacia diferentes países-, define y desarrolla una idea de red artística que permite abordar las distintas formas de circulación de su trabajo, a partir de un programa que vinculaba el aspecto editorial y las técnicas gráficas. El Arte Postal produce una relación a través de trayectorias que generan sistemas comunes; la idea de desplazamiento de las obras así como la reproductibilidad y pérdida del origen están estratégicamente visibilizadas en este contexto, a través de una especie de "coleccionismo del lugar" y un extrañamiento de lo que circula.

A mediados de los 60s Deisler se traslada junto a su familia desde Santiago a Antofagasta, en el norte chileno⁴. Desde este lugar, comenzó a realizar una serie de proyectos editoriales y de colaboración, primero visualizado en la editorial *Mimbre*, donde editaba sobre todo poemas de autores chilenos, todos ilustrados con sus grabados. Las maquetas de los libros eran minuciosamente construidas por el

artista de forma manual, y luego llevadas a una pequeña imprenta. Su idea desde siempre fue crear un soporte de inscripción para la amplia producción poética de autores que muchas veces no tenían la posibilidad de publicar en otras editoriales. En este contexto Deisler toma contacto con el grupo de poesía *Tebaida*, instalados en la ciudad de Arica en Chile, y posteriormente se integra a él, formalizándose una serie de colaboraciones entre *Mimbre* y el grupo de escritores. La noción de experimentación gráfica y editorial fue fundamental en toda la obra del artista, y no sólo considerando aspectos formales, sino que también relacionados a los modos de producción y distribución que él entendía sobre el trabajo artístico. Cuando en una entrevista le preguntan por qué escoge el nombre *Mimbre* para la editorial, él señala que de esa forma siempre habría una referencia a la artesanía, a aquella forma de producción de baja tecnología y distribución acotada pero de gran pregnancia dentro de una trama cultural y social.

En 1972 Deisler publica el libro *Poemas visivos y proposiciones a realizar*, y el mismo año publica también una antología de poesía visual de autores de distintos países, *Poesía visiva en el mundo*, ambos editados por ediciones *Mimbre*. En su texto escrito en 1985 *Sobre la poesía visual en Sudamérica* señala: "En mis inicios yo he utilizado el término visivo, poesía visiva, llevado por la tesis de que el poema, independientemente de no llevar palabras o textos, podía "leerse", que posee un "discurso". Hoy creo que está superado esto y se entiende como poesía visual en un sentido genérico a toda experimentación en este terreno, a diferencia de la fónica (con sonidos) y la tradicional (lineal)⁵". Para el artista fue importante señalar esta diferencia en la nominación de su propia práctica ya que de ese modo se inscribía en un contexto internacional más amplio, pero con una intención creativa que compartía con otros artistas en distintos lugares.

Deisler se interesó desde siempre en formas de circulación y colaboración dentro del contexto artístico chileno, y luego extenderá estas mismas inquietudes a las diversas redes de arte postal que se desarrollan desde distintas iniciativas de artistas en ciudades muy diversas. En este contexto, se destaca la red de colaboración que lleva adelante con los artistas Clemente Padín (Montevideo, Uruguay) y Edgardo Antonio Vigo (La Plata, Argentina), puesto que da cuenta de una serie de intercambios desde las producciones "colaborativas" de cada uno en su mismo lugar de producción, localizados en ciudades periféricas del Cono Sur. Sobre este vínculo Deisler comenta: "Con respecto a la situación en Sudamérica, la labor llevada a cabo como editor en la década del 60 y el intercambio activo con similares creadores en el cono sur, nos llevó a utilizar el correo como medio para nuestras expresiones y mensajes de carácter artístico. Vigo, en Argentina, Padín en Uruguay, Wladimir Dias-Pino en Brasil y otros siguen hoy, incluso, siendo los pilares de la

nueva experimentación en el terreno de la poesía visiva, como del arte-correo⁶, entendiendo el arte correo como un medio de circulación pero también de conexión sobre intereses comunes. En 1971 se realizó en el CAYC de Buenos Aires, organizado y coordinado por Edgardo Antonio Vigo y patrocinado por Jorge Glusberg, la Primera Muestra Internacional de Proposiciones a Realizar, donde, recuerda Deisler, se reunieron una serie de creadores de poesía visual: "Allí se dio cita toda la más amplia gama de experimentadores de la poesía visual, concreta, etcétera. Las salas de las galerías del CAYC con equipos de video daban cuenta de la utilización de ese medio; por los parlantes podías oír los poemas fónicos y otras experimentaciones en ese campo y por muros, espacios, etcétera, las otras expresiones en plano y en volumen⁷."

Se trataba, a través de estas redes de colaboración que demuestran una alta efectividad a la hora de pensar en modos de producción, de activar lugares no transitados por las artes visuales tradicionales. El sistema que propone la manufactura relacionada con una clara conciencia de la distribución de aquellos objetos, poemas cartas o dibujos, permiten re-pensar hoy en día aquello que se distribuye como nuevo objeto de intercambio. Mi propuesta es identificar aquello que, bajo el reconocimiento de las formas de colaboración en las redes de arte postal, nos permite pensar actualmente en una distribución de las experiencias⁸, ya no fijadas sólo en objetos, sino que en intercambios de momentos, afecciones, preocupaciones y deseos colectivos que se anticipaban en estos episodios de correspondencia.

SITUACION(ES) Y ESPIRITU COLECTIVO

En este caso, me referiré a algunas estrategias de circulación que se definen a partir de remarcar una situación desde una temporalidad socio política específica. Aquella que refleja una huella histórica como una manifestación externa de lo que sucedía en el contexto chileno de la Dictadura Militar, desde la vinculación con una serie de actividades y situaciones que se produjeron en Londres.

Para la exposición de la cual he sido co-curadora, "Subversive Practices Art under Conditions of Political Repression 60s-80s/Sud America/Europe"⁹, la artista chilena Cecilia Vicuña realizó una selección que le solicité de su archivo personal sobre parte de sus experiencias en Londres a principios de los 70s junto a la agrupación "Artist for Democracy" (AFD). Con una selección de imágenes y documentos de su archivo Vicuña escribió el texto "Páginas de un libro borrado", que relata parte de su experiencia en Londres, donde residía desde el mes de septiembre de 1972 gracias a una beca del British Council. La artista se encontraba en dicha ciudad el 11 de septiembre de 1973, día del Golpe Militar Chileno, cuando se llevó a cabo el

derrocamiento del Gobierno de la Unidad Popular bajo el mando del Presidente elegido democráticamente Salvador Allende, por parte de la Junta Militar encabezada por el General del Ejército Augusto Pinochet.

Vicuña recuerda diferentes situaciones que vivió en Londres antes y después de su experiencia con AFD, y cómo se prepararon las distintas acciones que este grupo desarrolló en sus inicios: *"En abril de 1974, The Artist Union, encabezada por Conrad Atkinson, se reunió en el ICA (Instituto of Contemporary Art). Yo asistí como parte del público. Mientras escuchaba la reunión, me sentí obligada a hablar a favor de los trabajadores de la cultura perseguidos en Chile. Mis palabras tocaron una fibra y la gente aplaudió. Hubo una sed de acción, un deseo de justicia. Una nota escrita en el momento a mano, llegó a mí. Fue firmada por David Medalla, John Dugger y Guy Brett. Nos hicimos buenos amigos¹⁰."*

A partir de este encuentro es que Vicuña toma conocimiento que anteriormente Medalla y Brett formaron un grupo llamado "Artist For Liberation Front", que en ese momento ya no estaba activo; por ello, la artista sugiere formar una nueva organización que se llamara AFD, dedicada a *apoyar las luchas del Tercer Mundo*, cuyo primer proyecto sería el apoyo a Chile. En ese momento John Dugger diseña el logotipo de la asociación, realizándose la primera reunión de AFD el 6 de mayo de 1974 en casa de Medalla y Dugger. De esa reunión la artista recuerda: *"estaban presente ellos dos, Guy Brett, yo, y dos estudiantes: Hugh Cave y Stephen Pusey. Luego el grupo empezó a crecer."*

El primer proyecto de AFD fue una muestra colectiva en "Arts Meeting Place", un espacio de arte alternativo en "Covent Garden". Era *"una especie de cuadrado subterráneo, ahí se hacían reuniones y exhibiciones de "vanguardia". Carolee Schneeman¹¹ mostró justo antes que nosotros."* La exhibición incluyó obras de Medalla, Dugger, June Terra (artista filipino) y de Vicuña. El espacio fue dividido en cuatro partes: Dugger expuso algunos de sus *banners* (estandartes), Medalla recreó una obra anterior donde cubría a una persona de arcilla, Terra expuso fotografías y unas telas relacionadas a Filipinas y Vicuña presentó una obra llamada *"journal of objects for the chilean resistance"*. La artista recuerda que Brett escribió un artículo en el *London Times* donde mencionó sólo las obras de Medalla, Dugger y Terra.

AFD fue creciendo en términos de adherentes. Se reunían en el espacio de la revista *Studio International*, donde Vicuña recuerda que se juntaba mucha gente, llegando incluso a 300 personas en algunas reuniones, aunque el nivel de compromiso iba modificándose, pues la mayoría de los asistentes a las reuniones eran curiosos, personas que querían solamente enterarse de qué cuestiones se

estaban gestando pero sin involucrarse demasiado al momento de desarrollar y programar las actividades. Las personas que asistían provenían de distintos sitios, "africanos, checos, latinos, galeses, escoceses, entre otros. Los que más se implicaban en la planificación de las actividades eran no más de 10 personas", el grupo base de la asociación y algunos estudiantes interesados con energía para invertir en las actividades que luego desarrollarían.

La idea que surge -de apoyar el movimiento de resistencia desde Londres hacia Chile- tuvo un momento de visibilidad cuando Dugger sugiere organizar un *Festival de las Artes para la Democracia en Chile*. El grupo escribió una carta pidiendo a los artistas del mundo donar obras para una exposición y posterior subasta de las obras, programada para octubre de 1974 en Londres. La carta trataba de sensibilizar a diversos artistas sobre las condiciones en que Chile estaba en el momento, pero también especificando que el proceso cultural que el país había vivido mediante el apoyo a la producción cultural durante el gobierno de la Unidad Popular, mantenía un importante precedente, invocando aquel "laboratorio de la invención" que señala Vicuña. Parte de la convocatoria firmada por la AFD plantea lo siguiente:

Pero, como la conciencia, la capacidad de análisis y la iniciativa conjunta no pueden ser suspendidas y la falta de libertad de expresión es sólo un reflejo de la falta de libertad de asociación y de discusión, los artistas participan en el amplio frente para oponerse a la dictadura y crear una democracia renovada que hoy en día involucra a la mayoría de los chilenos. Es en apoyo moral y financiero de este frente que ahora organizamos este festival "Artistas para la democracia en Chile" en el Royal College of Art. Hacemos un llamado a su solidaridad como artista ser humano que nos ayude a convertir el actual sufrimiento de la tortura, el encarcelamiento y el exilio en energía creativa, a fin de hacer de nuevo de Chile una tierra fértil para el amor y la creación.

Es interesante pensar que una de las armas más importantes de este llamado se basa en el concepto de la solidaridad, que el mismo Allende utilizó para la creación del en 1971 del "Museo de la Solidaridad" junto a José María Moreno Galván, José Balmes y Mario Pedrosa, entre otros¹². Además, la carta deja en claro que una eficaz alternativa frente a la censura y la represión sería la asociatividad, por ello también se justifica el interés de AFD en contextos represivos. En su misma creación estaría la potencia que luego se reflejará en el encuentro de Trafalgar Square.

AFD se relacionó también con algunos sindicatos de trabajadores ingleses y con la *Campaña de Solidaridad con Chile*, que se sumaron a la iniciativa de realizar una manifestación masiva en Trafalgar Square. Este último era un grupo bastante grande, muy activo y politizado. *“Eran primordialmente ingleses, con alguno que otro chileno recién llegado. No le dieron mucho interés a AFD, ellos se ocupaban de cosas candentes como ayudar a los refugiados. Yo colaboré con ellos y asistía a sus reuniones, y si ellos fueron a las reuniones en AFD no lo recuerdo. Ellos organizaban las conferencias que yo y otros chilenos dábamos a los sindicatos, recuerda la artista.”*

En cuanto a la relación con los sindicatos, esta fue bastante intensa, y se refleja en algunas instancias que Vicuña señala como “memorables”: *“El o los sindicatos, enviaron a una delegada, una joven artista: Mavis Penn, que trabajaba con nosotros y servía de “liasson”. Debe haber sido muy efectiva porque la gente del sindicato se hizo presente en algunos actos. Recuerdo algunos, como el acto de homenaje a Vietnam donde estaban los sindicatos, Dugger y yo (con obras) pero no el resto de AFD. El acto de colaboración más memorable fue la marcha en Trafalgar Square. Supongo que ese vínculo lo hizo Mavis, o quizás Dugger.”*

El 15 de septiembre de 1974 se realizó la manifestación masiva en Trafalgar Square; John Dugger diseñó y creó a mano una bandera sembrada como pieza central del escenario de la manifestación. Vicuña recuerda que esa bandera se realizó en su taller y que *“era un estandarte gigante de aproximadamente 10 x 5 metros... John diseñaba la obra en papel, la transfería a la tela, la cortaba a mano y la cosía a máquina.”*

En el Royal Collage of Art de Londres se desarrolló el “Festival de las Artes para la Democracia en Chile”; sin un curador, fue montado por voluntarios de la AFD. Vicuña señala que contaron con la colaboración del artista chileno Roberto Matta, quien voló desde Italia, donde residía en ese momento, y pintó un gran mural de papel; además participaron otros artistas e intelectuales con envíos desde diferentes partes del mundo, como Julio Cortázar, Christo, Sol Lewitt, y Edgardo Vigo, entre otros. Vicuña señala: *“Ariel Dorfman, que estaba en el exilio, vino de Roma para pronunciar el discurso de apertura. Una carta de los artistas encarcelados en Chile fue leída en la gran reunión”.* Distintas razones no permitieron que esta actividad tuviera un buen final; Vicuña ha señalado que distintos conflictos internos, acusaciones y presiones no permitieron que muchas de las actividades paralelas se desarrollaran. Desde ese momento AFD comenzó a desmoronarse.

“Páginas de un libro borrado” es un ejercicio de aquella memoria que es parte de una potencia que hoy en día sigue allí y que nos permite revisarla. También pensar

en aquel espíritu colectivo que se manifestó y que se resiste finalmente a las borraduras de sus relatos. Cuando Vicuña se refiere a su experiencia final con la asociación, comenta: “AFD vivió por algún tiempo, pero finalmente se disolvió. Toda la memoria de su potencial fue borrado junto con la destrucción del sueño de Chile...”

LUGAR(ES) O CUERPO SOCIAL.¹³

El C.A.D.A. (Colectivo de Acciones de Arte) surge de la reunión de 5 productores culturales chilenos: dos artistas (Lotty Rosenfeld y Juan Castillo), un sociólogo (Fernando Balcells), un poeta (Raúl Zurita) y una escritora (Diamela Eltit).

El nombre de COLECTIVO para el grupo, está originado en parte de la herencia militante de algunos de sus integrantes en el MAPU (Movimiento de Acción Popular Unitaria) que llamaba a sus células organizacionales “colectivos”. Sobre la noción de ACCIONES algunos de sus integrantes han mencionado en entrevistas que su interés era distanciarse de la noción de performance y happening, muy cercana en el contexto chileno al uso por parte de Enrique Lihn y Alejandro Jodorowsky. Desde ese punto de vista la acción conllevaba un trasfondo de agresión, por lo tanto, la acción como intervención pasaba a ser una escenificación no tanto de los problemas individuales sino que comunes. La intención de esta acción de arte estaba volcada hacia la mirada sobre la calle, estableciendo algo como una *Inversión de Escena*.

La palabra ARTE en el nombre del Colectivo, refería un punto de vista que distanciaba sus prácticas del terreno militante, llevándolas a un territorio donde todo fuera posible, es decir, al terreno del arte, que permite las más variadas posibilidades de convencimiento. Esta “cualidad” del arte posibilita operar en territorios politizados a partir de diversas estrategias que subvierten las convenciones en el terreno local. Así, el colectivo no sólo quiere proponer una manera distinta de referirse a la práctica artística en el contexto cultural chileno, sino que uno de sus objetivos es subvertir e ironizar el trabajo que la Izquierda tradicional chilena estaba llevando adelante en uno de los momentos más duros de la Dictadura chilena.

El CADA realiza una serie de intervenciones sobre el espacio público de la ciudad, para manifestar su oposición política y cultural. Estas van construyendo aspectos problemáticos de nuestro país a partir de re-pensar el lugar que tienen estas prácticas en el entramado cultural de la Dictadura Militar.

A partir de una serie de gestos residuales que reinscriben la relación de objeto y sujeto político. C.A.D.A. elabora una estrategia de circulación internacional que re- piensa constantemente la idea de lugar, en el sentido de acotar sus intereses a un

replanteamiento sobre la inscripción de las prácticas artísticas y culturales en un escenario represivo. Las acciones de tipo gráfico, editorial, videográfico, entre otros, conforman una cualidad donde lo político se confronta con lo artístico en el escenario de la ciudad.

En abril de 1984 el CADA escribe un "llamado a artistas del Colectivo Acciones de Arte", donde convoca a artistas para colaborar con la inscripción de la consigna *No+*. Como señalan: "*La invitación es a que los artistas internacionales la activen en sus propios países de la manera que lo consideren pertinente y sus registros sean devueltos a Chile a través de los coordinadores responsables en cada país*¹⁴." Con este llamado a artistas de todo el mundo para comprometerse en esta acción y utilizar la frase en distintos momentos y situaciones, C.A.D.A. propagaba un gesto mínimo para lograr un efecto máximo.

Comenzada en septiembre de 1983, a diez años del Golpe Militar en Chile. La acción consistió en escribir en distintos muros de la ciudad de Santiago la consigna *No+*, junto a una serie de colaboradores que tomaron esta frase y la hicieron propagarse por los más diversos sitios.

Hasta el día de hoy se puede ver en la calle y en los medios la utilización de la consigna *No+*, ya que la fuerza de esta acción ya no viene de la suma de fuerzas diferentes sino de la multitud disgregada sobre el espacio público, a modo de un espacio de creación colectiva.

El Colectivo se disolvió luego de esta acción; como ha señalado Diamela Eltit en una entrevista: "*Nunca habíamos sospechado que aquello iba a adquirir la magnitud que adquirió, no teníamos ya como apropiarnos de lo que habíamos hecho, y de a poco todos fuimos sintiendo que no había nada más que hacer*¹⁵." Una obra siempre construye un tipo de expansión y la experiencia no devuelve nada o simplemente lo necesario y lo que espera es que el retorno se transforme en afecto, en una afección y un aliento común.

LATENCIA Y AFECTIV SPECIFIC

Este Protocolo de experiencias que he ejemplificado a partir de las nociones de Redes, Situaciones y Lugares puede permitirnos encontrar el sentido a la producción en el presente y confrontar nuestras mismas prácticas de investigación. Hay mucho por aprender de nuestro contexto cultural allí, de las formas en cómo fue posible que se realizaran las acciones, de cómo conformaron un cuerpo sobre el cual muchos años más tarde seguimos hablando y sobre todo considerando un referente para complejizar nuestro escenario de producción contemporáneo, desde la memoria.

Cuando nos preguntamos hoy en día con los colegas investigadores, artistas, miembros de colectivos o espacios artísticos independientes, cómo seguir haciendo nuestras cosas en el presente, mantener una postura crítica, ser efectivos, estrechar aspectos afectivos en una red de colaboración colectiva que pueda impactar de alguna manera el presente, es cuando desde mi perspectiva el trabajo de investigación tiene sentido. Creo que sobre esa identificación de los *modos de hacer* es donde aquella memoria se reactiva para la experiencia contemporánea, donde es posible poner de manifiesto que una serie de afecciones nos permiten accionar desde ahora en diversos proyectos comunes desde aquel lugar específico donde se inscribe la afección.

Paulina Varas Alarcón (1975)

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Ha escrito sobre arte chileno y latinoamericano contemporáneo en diversas revistas y publicaciones internacionales como: *Brumaria*, *ArteContexto*, *LatinArt*, *PLUS*, entre otros. En 2009 ha publicado el libro *Muntadas en Latinoamérica* editado por la Universidad de Caldas, Colombia.

Ha sido curadora de: *Cierto tipo de poética política*, Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes en Valparaíso (2008) y *Aproximaciones a una poética política* en el marco de la *VI Bienal de Arte* del Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Santiago (2008). Fue co-curadora de *Subversive Practices, Art under conditions of political repression, 60s-80s South America-Europe*, Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart, Alemania (2009) y co-curadora de *Valparaíso: Intervenciones* (2010), proyectos artísticos de más de una veintena de artistas chilenos y extranjeros sobre la ciudad de Valparaíso y el Lenguaje. En 2010 ha sido premiada por el gobierno chileno como curadora responsable del proyecto "Sitio, Tiempo, Contexto y Afecciones específicas" realizado

colectivamente para el Centro Cultural Gabriela Mistral y que se recoge en el sitio www.275dias.cl

TRANSLATION

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She has written on Contemporary Chilean Art and Latin American Art in various journals and international publications such as: *Brumaria*, *Artecontexto*, *LatinArt*, *PLUS*, among others. In 2009, she published the book *Muntadas in Latinoamérica* published by the Universidad de Caldas, Colombia. She has been curator in: *Cierto tipo de Poética política*, Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes en Valparaíso (2008) and *Vienal, Aproximaciones a una poética política* in the context of the Sixth Biennial National Art Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago (2008). She was co-curator of *Subversive Practices, Art under Conditions of Political Repression, 60s-80s South America-Europe*, Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart, Germany (2009) and co-curator of *Valparaíso: Intervenciones* (2010) <http://www.valparaisointervenciones.com> This art projects were more than 20 between artists on the city of Valparaiso and its Language. In 2010 she was awarded by the Chilean government as a curator responsible for the project "Site, Time, Context and Specific Affections" held collectively for the Centro Cultural Gabriela Mistral, as appears on the site www.275dias.cl

¹ Cita extraída de la conferencia presentada por el *Colectivo Situaciones*, presentada en el Centro Cultural de España en Santiago de Chile el 24 de marzo del 2009. Inédita.

² Esa "calidad de la experiencia" -según Suely Rolnik- sería algo así como la identificación de una densidad de sentido, en ciertas prácticas artísticas y sociales, que bajo un interés y programa común se transforman en un acontecimiento de la experiencia, y que sobre todo movilizan nuevos enfoques y análisis sobre esas situaciones colectivas e individuales manifestadas en algunos proyectos de artistas o colectivos latinoamericanos de los años 60s y 70s. Rolnik ha señalado en un texto sobre la artista brasileña Lygia Clark cómo algunas generaciones de artistas a partir de los noventa han comenzado a realizar movimientos colectivos, cuestionando las condiciones del circuito internacional del arte: "Lo que estos artistas pretenden -como pretendían también los de los años sesenta- es *asegurar la respiración crítica de su obra*, a menudo sofocada en los salones mundanos de los espacios institucionales destinados a la producción artística" (la cursiva de la cita es mía). El texto titulado "Lygia llamando" es una versión revisada y ampliada del texto presentado en 10.000

FRANCOS DE RECOMPENSA (el museo de arte contemporáneo vivo o muerto), encuentro internacional promovido por la Asociación de Directores de Arte Contemporáneo de España-ADACE (Baeza, Jaén, del 15 al 18 de diciembre de 2006).

³ Mi estudio sobre la obra de Guillermo Deisler ha estado relacionado con dos recientes proyectos curatoriales que he desarrollado en conjunto con el curador chileno Ramón Castillo. El primero es la participación de nuestra curaduría en la exposición *Subversive Practices. Art under Conditions of Political Repression 60s-80s/Sud America/Europe*, 30 de mayo al 2 de agosto de 2009, Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart. La segunda experiencia de trabajo fue para la exposición *Poesía Visual* realizada en el Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Santiago desde el 22 de septiembre hasta el 25 de octubre. Estos dos proyectos que hemos desarrollado han sido gracias a la generosidad y apoyo de Laura Coll, viuda de Deisler.

⁴ Guillermo Deisler vivió en Antofagasta hasta 1973, donde fue profesor de la Universidad de Antofagasta, hasta que fue detenido por la Dictadura y se exilió junto a su familia primero en Bulgaria y luego en Alemania.

⁵ Guillermo Deisler, "Sobre la poesía visual en Sudamérica" Cesar Espinosa (editor), en *Post Arte. Poesía en Circulación/Poetical Network* (México D.F. sin editorial, 1985), folleto.

⁶ (Deisler, 1985)

⁷ (Deisler 1985)

⁸ Hace un tiempo escribí un texto llamado *La distribución de la experiencia* y consistía básicamente en describir, situar y problematizar aquello que denominamos como la producción desde un lugar específico, casi siempre invisible o irrelevante, fuera de cualquier lugar de aquello que llamamos todavía centro. Me focalizaba en el trabajo que realizamos desde el Centro de Residencias para Artistas Contemporáneos en Valparaíso junto a un sinnúmero de colegas, socios y amigos en muchas ciudades. Paulina Varas "La distribución de la experiencia" en: *CRAC Valparaíso, Memoria de Experiencias y Actividades* (Valparaíso: CRAC, 2009), 10-14.

⁹ Trabajo curatorial realizado junto a Ramón Castillo y en la que participaron 13 curadores de Sudamérica y Europa del Este para *Subversive Practices. Art under Conditions of Political Repression 60s-80s/Sud America/Europe* 30 de mayo al 2 de agosto de 2009, Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart.

¹⁰ Las distintas citas de la artista que conforman este texto (todas en cursiva) son parte de su relato en "Paginas de un libro borrado" y también de una entrevista por correo electrónico que le hizo la autora en septiembre de 2009, para complementar algunos datos de su texto.

¹¹ Carole Sheeman es una artista estadounidense que ha basado su trabajo en los discursos del cuerpo, la sexualidad y el género. La performance a la que se refiere Vicuña es "Up To And Including Her Limits", de la cual una de sus versiones fue presentada en el *Arts Meeting Place* en 1974.

¹² El "Museo de la Solidaridad", creado en Chile como una de las medidas del Gobierno de la Unidad Popular de Salvador Allende, fue inaugurado en mayo de 1972. En su discurso de inauguración el Presidente Allende señala "*Es para mí un honor, muy significativo, recibir a nombre del pueblo de Chile estas muestras, estos cuadros, estas obras que nos envían, como expresión solidaria, artistas de los distintos continentes*"... y continúa señalando que el museo "*Es la expresión solidaria de hombres de distintos pueblos y razas que, a pesar de la distancia, entregan su capacidad creadora, sin reticencias, al pueblo de Chile [...]. Y lo hacen en los momentos en que también mi Patria es distinguida al señalársele como el lugar para que se reúnan representantes de 141 países en la Tercera Conferencia de Comercio y Desarrollo*". (<http://www.abacq.net/imaginaria/discur8.htm>)

¹³ Mi investigación sobre el trabajo del Colectivo de Acciones de Arte (CADA) recientemente ha estado vinculada al proyecto de la Trienal de Chile (2009) a partir de la invitación a ser investigadora del archivo del CADA para la exposición emplazada en Valparaíso *Arte Latinoamérica: Estados de Sitio*, curatoría de Gabriel Peluffo Linari y Alberto Madrid. El texto producto de esta investigación será publicado en el catálogo de la Trienal.

¹⁴ CADA *Llamado a artistas del Colectivo Acciones de Arte* documento (Santiago de Chile, abril de 1984)

¹⁵ GALENDE, Federico *Filtraciones 1 Conversaciones Sobre Arte En Chile (De Los 60 A Los 80)* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 2007), 226.

Paulina Varas Alarcón (1975)

Investigadora y curadora independiente. Candidata a Doctora en Historia y Teoría del Arte por la Universidad de Barcelona y Licenciada en Arte por la Universidad de Playa Ancha, Chile. Co-directora de *CRAC Centro de Residencias para Artistas Contemporáneos* en la ciudad de Valparaíso (www.cracvalparaiso.org) y miembro de la Red de investigadores sobre Conceptualismos del Sur y de la Red iberoamericana de Residencias Independientes.

Ha escrito sobre arte chileno y latinoamericano contemporáneo en diversas revistas y publicaciones internacionales como: *Brumaria*, *ArteContexto*, *LatinArt*, *PLUS*, entre otros. En 2009 ha publicado el libro *Muntadas en Latinoamérica* editado por la Universidad de Caldas, Colombia.

Ha sido curadora de: *Cierto tipo de poética política*, Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes en Valparaíso (2008) y *Aproximaciones a una poética política* en el marco de la *VI Bienal de Arte* del Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Santiago (2008). Fue co-curadora de *Subversive Practices, Art under conditions of political repression, 60s-80s South America-Europe*, Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart, Alemania (2009) y co-curadora de *Valparaíso: Intervenciones* (2010), proyectos artísticos de más de una veintena de artistas chilenos y extranjeros sobre la ciudad de Valparaíso y el Lenguaje. En 2010 ha sido premiada por el gobierno chileno como curadora responsable del proyecto "Sitio, Tiempo, Contexto y Afecciones específicas" realizado colectivamente para el Centro Cultural Gabriela Mistral y que se recoge en el sitio www.275dias.cl

TRANSLATION

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Researcher and independent curator. PhD (c) in History and Art Theory at the Universidad de Barcelona and Bachelor in Arts at the Universidad de Playa Ancha, Chile. Co-Director *CRAC*, Contemporary Artists of Residencias Center in the city of Valparaiso, Chile (www.cracvalparaiso.org) and member of the *Red de Conceptualismos del Sur* and the *Red iberoamericana de Residencias Independientes*.

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Lisa Mosier
PhD Candidate, Tulane University

**Transnational Encounter/Transdisciplinary Form:
The *Centro de Arte y Comunicación* and Conceptualism in Art and Architecture**

This paper focuses on a salient aspect of the *Centro de Arte y Comunicación* (CAyC) of Buenos Aires—its explicit attention to both art and architecture—in order to examine the transnational roots of this duality as well as to discern its effects on the forms of artistic and critical production, methods of dissemination, and international activities associated with the group. Although reflective of a characteristic interdisciplinarity of conceptualism, the CAyC merits special consideration among platforms for conceptualist critique in Latin America for its contributions to both art and architectural discourses. Architecture is a pronounced presence in the conceptual art forms originated by members of the group, the formats of its exhibitions and publications, as well as in the content of its work and the scope of its international pursuits.

This introduction provides an overview of the CAyC's organization and activities, locating the group within theoretical, political, and geographic contexts. The main portion of this study concentrates on a few representative examples of the influence of architectural theories and methods on the CAyC's conceptual art works and critical positions, as this influence resulted in distinctive formal solutions and provided a 'language' with which to encode critique of regional and international socio-political conditions. Through this survey, the work of the CAyC's members demonstrates idiosyncratic individuality within a coherent collaborative vision, in a total production that reveals extensive parallels between theory, methods, and form.

The CAyC emerged at the end of the 1960s, a decade in which conceptual art flourished in Buenos Aires under the support of the DiTella Institute. Ultimately spanning more than 30 years of activity, the CAyC constituted a major force in Argentine art during the 1970s. Directed by the controversial critic Jorge Glusberg,¹ it comprised a collective of artists and architects known as the *Grupo de los Trece* (later *Grupo Cayc*). The CAyC sponsored their work and functioned as an organizational entity for hundreds of exhibits and events such as colloquia, seminars, and performances at its headquarters and in international forums.² Its concurrent publishing enterprise issued an assortment of exhibition catalogs, conference proceedings, and volumes of Glusberg's theoretical essays. Through tireless self-documentation, promotion, and ambitious participation in biennials and congresses worldwide, the CAyC forged intricate transnational networks.³ So strongly were they identified with conceptualism in Argentina, Mercedes Casanegra remarks, "to a certain point it is difficult to separate the history of Conceptualism's spread in the seventies from the activities at Cayc."⁴

From its inception, the organization identified art, architecture, and communication as the 'three major axes' of its purview,⁵ engaging the most current intellectual and critical trends in these areas. While the CAyC's members and activities were highly relevant within contemporary discourses of art—and have been examined primarily from this perspective—this tripartite disposition sets them apart. The

‘communication axis’ designated the group’s theoretical persuasions, which traversed semiotics, cybernetics, and systems and information theory. Traces of these interests are evident in work representing a continuum between art and architectural production, and the group operated across both domains. The architecturally relevant examples addressed in this paper constitute a subcategory of the CAyC’s total output, but are also an unequivocal distinguishing feature.

Of sixteen eventual members of the *Grupo de los Trece/Grupo Cayc*, six or seven were architects, one was an industrial designer, and seven were artists with no architectural background; Glusberg, the remaining member, was a prolific critic whose efforts were fairly evenly divided between art and architecture.⁶ The architectural pursuits of the CAyC are evidenced in over 60 discrete publications dealing explicitly with architecture (e.g., histories, exhibition catalogs, theoretical essays), many of which were also published in alternate language editions.

Situated within the larger context of Latin American conceptualism of the 1960s and 70s, the CAyC displays attributes of this field that have been delineated by several major critics and historians.⁷ These include a group structure, a collaborative approach, and the pushing of interdisciplinary methods to extremes which, as articulated by Dressler and Christ, gave rise to ‘paradigm shifts’ and “practices that... radically question the conventional concept of art.”⁸ Like other artists in this category, the CAyC was characterized by intellectual inclinations and an engagement with critical theory, which enkindled the use of conceptual forms as coded or strategic critique—especially in regards to political violence, social conditions, and institutional ideology in Latin America and to the center/periphery opposition epitomizing European and North American domination.

The interdisciplinary and experimental nature of conceptualism led to the incorporation of diverse methodological influences, with heterogeneous formal results. This flexibility reflected a shift from the evaluation of art as an aesthetic object to the definition of art as a discursive product meant to participate in theoretical debates. The prominent role of language in conceptual art has been especially emphasized. Luis Camnitzer attributes the prevalence of writing-based projects to the strong influence of structuralism and semiotics—which share origins in linguistics—in Latin America.⁹

However, as the study of signs, semiotics encompasses many other systems of visual communication—a distinction crucial to this argument. Argentina played a pivotal role in the international expansion of semiotic architectural theory in the 1960s and 70s, a coincidence of substantial relevance to the study of the CAyC. Importantly, the metaphor of architecture as language was not only central to this theory, but offers a useful analogy for the interpretation of the conceptual projects discussed in the next section.

Architectural methods in conceptual art

The work of certain artists of the *Grupo* was clearly informed by architectural methods. Significantly, this influence manifested as a form in which architectural drawing was used conceptually, parallel to the use of text by other artists. These projects rely on a semiotic interpretation of drafting conventions and related techniques of architectural representation as a *sign system*; this system is defined by its utility as a means of *communication*—the transmission of a message via a shared code between sender and receiver.¹⁰ This correspondence between semiotics and the appropriation of

architectural drawing demonstrates a relationship between theory and form comparable to the privileging of written language in structuralist linguistics and the use of words in conceptual art.¹¹ In the work examined below, artists Luis Bénédit, Horacio Zabala, and Jacques Bedel¹² distinctively employed the ‘language’ of architecture¹³—the methodology of its visual representation, e.g.: projected views, plans, sections, perspectives, icons, diagrams, notations, construction documents, models, and the architectural proposal itself—as a strategic critical method, resulting in varied expressions.

Several of Luis Bénédit’s projects from the early 1970s such as *Habitat for White Mice* (Fig. 1) and *Habitat for Cockroaches* had two components: a maze-like, model ‘habitat’ made of plexiglass, containing live animals; and a detailed architectural drawing of the habitat that was exhibited alongside or in place of the model. The drawings call attention to the habitats’ layout, which echoes the Modernist free plan advanced by Le Corbusier. Each model comprises a rectangular enclosure with the internal space regulated by a column grid, into which Bénédit inserts planar, wall-like elements to construct a labyrinthine environment for the animals.

In the drawings, Bénédit replicates conventional uses of drafting, applying standard techniques to represent the physical form of the habitat in measured, ‘hard lined’ drawings, just as an architect drafts construction documents for a building. The habitats are shown in typical plan, section, and axonometric projections (a view from above, a cutaway view from the side, and a 3-D view, respectively). However, Bénédit also diverges from convention, exaggerating customary notations for effect. Arrows indicate circulation, yet hint at chaotic conditions and the subjection of the animals to an apparatus of control. Communicative elements such as numbers, notes, and call-out lines appear nonsensically, providing no real information but lending an air of scientificity. This use of standard techniques signals something beyond a straightforward depiction.

The plexiglass habitats have been interpreted as an analogy for human behavior in response to an imposed, constrictive environment.¹⁴ In them, the viewer imagines animals—or humans—as helplessly reactive to manipulations by powerful external

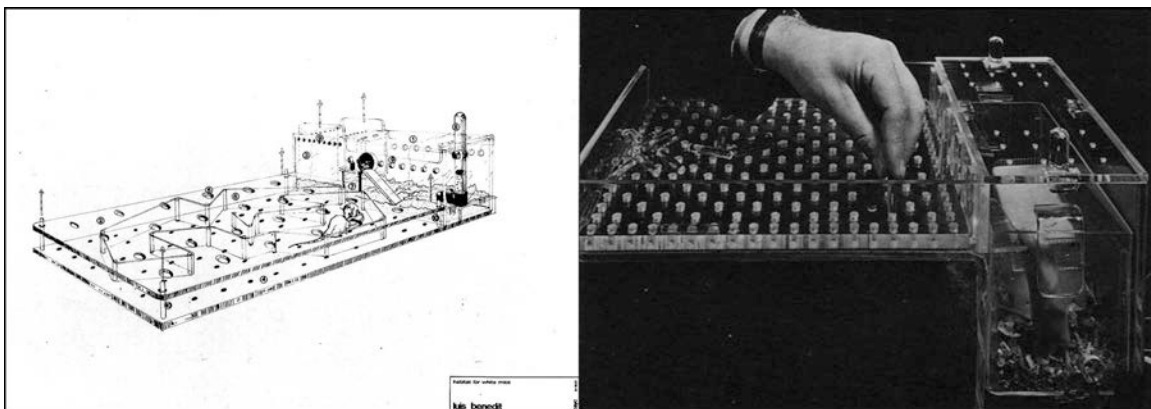


Fig. 1. Luis Bénédit, *Habitat for White Mice* (1972), ink on heliographic paper, 22 ½” x 33 ½”, Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries.

Luis Bénédit, *Labarinto para ratones blancos* (1971), plexiglass and other materials.

forces.¹⁵ Benedit's suggestive use of drafting conventions conveys this impression in the drawings, but the habitats also exploit architectural representational techniques. As in an architectural model, the projected analogy between animals and humans is primarily reinforced by the effect of scale, which allows the habitats to be understood as a microcosm of a human environment.¹⁶

Horacio Zabala's *Anteproyectos* (1973-74) (**Fig. 2**)—denoting a preliminary architectural proposal—are presented as a series of proposals for prison cells for artists, based on a standard format.¹⁷ Zabala cites the fictional spaces of incarceration in settings that emphasize the isolation of imprisonment: a cell adrift in the Rio Plata, a subterranean cell beneath the city of Buenos Aires, and a cell atop a column in the Sierras de Cordoba. In contrast to Benedit's work, these are not drawings for a project that will (or can) be built. The proposal itself unmistakably *is* the work of art; however, Zabala uses drafting techniques in a way that is highly consistent with actual construction documents. Showing the imaginary cells in plan and section, the two views essential to any architectural representation, he faithfully follows graphic standards indicating materials, structure, and dimensions.

There are two registers of architectural associations in this work. First, Zabala represents social and political tensions with the metaphor of a prison cell, an archetypal space that can be traced to Piranesi's architectural renderings and which evinces Foucauldian surveillance and punishment.¹⁸ Secondly, he visually communicates this metaphor by illustrating his theoretical proposal with the most practical conventions of architectural drawing. By cloaking the imaginary in the trappings of the real, Zabala's works become more specifically suggestive, provoking questions about the power that has commissioned these works, how they will be built, and whom they will contain. They offer the viewer a glimpse at the plans for a secret and sinister infrastructure, the civil works of a monstrously repressive state.¹⁹

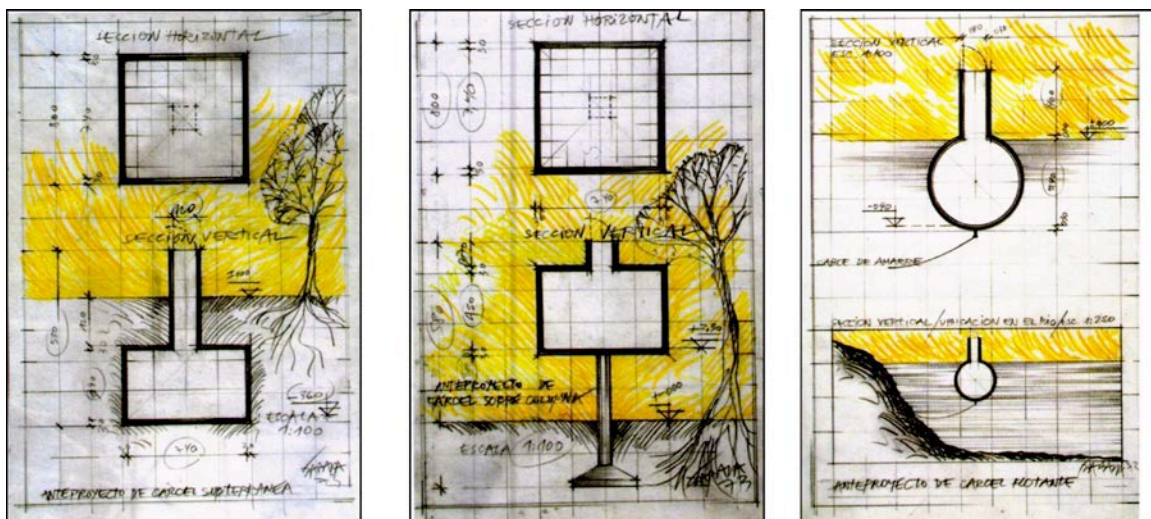


Fig. 2. Horacio Zabala, *Anteproyecto de cárcel subterránea*; *Anteproyecto de cárcel sobre columna*; *Anteproyecto de cárcel flotante* (1973), pencil on paper, 22 x 31.8cm, in María José Herrera, *Horacio Zabala: Anteproyectos* (1972-1978) (Buenos Aires: Editorial Fundación Alon, 2007).

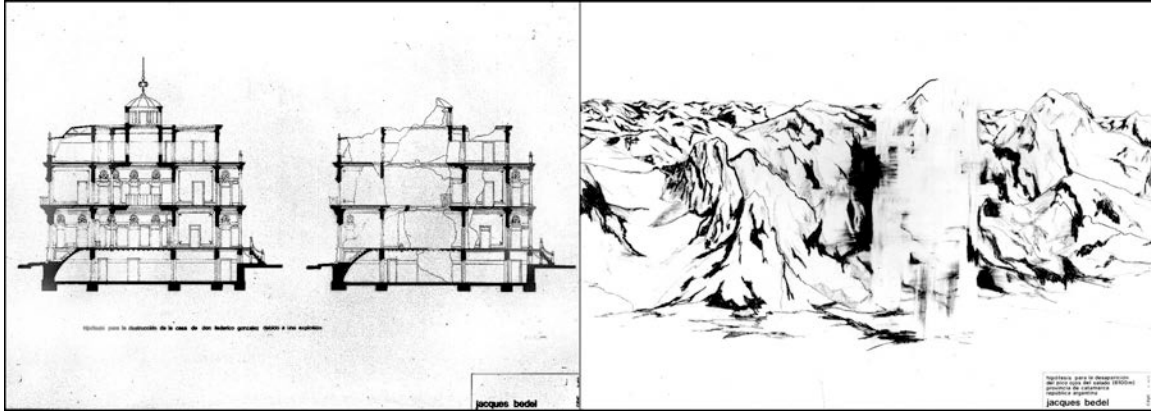


Fig. 3. Jacques Bedel, *Hipótesis para la destrucción de la casa de Don Federico Gonzalez debido a una explosion* (1972) and *Hipótesis para la desaparición del pico Ojos del Salado (6100m) Provincia de Catamarca República Argentina* (1972). Heliographic print. Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries.

In his series *Hypotheses* (1972), Jacques Bedel transcends the use of architectural techniques as a representational method, applying them as a *transformational* device by which the final work is executed. Formatted as construction documents, the series is unified by the theme of a destructive act toward a monumental entity, e.g., *Hypothesis for the Disappearance of the Ojos de Salado Peak* and *Hypothesis for the Destruction of the House of Don Federico Gonzalez by an Explosion* (Fig. 3). In each, Bedel employs Beaux-Arts drafting techniques to reproduce an iconic representation of a monumental architectural, urban, or natural form. Cathedrals, villas, mountains, and cities are depicted in *pochéd* plans, elaborate perspectives, and bird's eye views.

Bedel then renders the hypothetical destruction by aggressively altering the iconic image, achieving this transformative effect through the natural actions of drawing itself: manipulations of line, erasures, and overlays. In certain works, he extends these actions, which function here as a violation of the page, by tearing or even burning the paper. These maneuvers consistently transform but do not entirely obscure the original image.

Here, drawing—itself violent—becomes a proxy for the act of violence that suddenly transforms a familiar landscape, as insinuated by the erasure of the peak or the crack of an earthquake superimposed on the plan of Paris. Bedel attacks the apparent stability of the monumental—associated with permanence, national identity, and the display of power—by his conceptual act of seizing and disfiguring his subjects.

This use of architectural methods is strictly conceptual. Bedel's projects do not mimic the communicative function of construction documents as in Zabala's work; they offer no possibility of being built. Rather, the *Hypotheses* articulate a theme of indirectly subverted power, revealed by the transmutation of forms and shifts in meaning produced by the operations of drawing.²⁰

Transdisciplinary form in collaborative critical production

In several instances, the CAyC also produced an unusual publication format: collaborative books juxtaposing Glusberg's theoretical architectural essays with conceptual drawings by the architects. The texts and illustrations have no overt correspondence; rather, the complete work implies common theoretical influences and

programmatic motivations. Glusberg's essays not only offer much to support the semiotic interpretation of architectural methods in conceptual art discussed above, but significantly, they merge with the critical aims of the accompanying architectural proposals, resulting in a coherent critique presented across commingled forms. This level of integration supports a view of these books as a transdisciplinary form of critical production.

A first example, *Sociosemiótica de la Arquitectura* (1978),²¹ combines a long essay by Glusberg with drawings by Benedit and Clorindo Testa.²² Glusberg's text is indicative of the interest in semiotics in international architectural discourses of the period, as well as the special prominence of this theoretical trajectory in Argentina.²³ Following the general methodology of these studies, the essay considers architecture in terms of signification and communication, and features language as a key concept. Glusberg takes a social approach, emphasizing the complex relationship between the built environment and its user(s), which he refers to as 'habitat' and '*homo habitans*.' Defined by the act of dwelling; this figure constitutes an 'ecological subject' fixed within intersecting 'discourses of the environment.'²⁴

The illustrations take the form of architectural sketches, incorporating basic conventions, but drawn freehand rather than hard lined. Benedit contributes eight versions of an imaginary project titled *La casa que costó un millón* (Fig. 4). Reminiscent of his habitats, each iteration presents a bizarre, caricature-like house of an A-frame type, with circular apertures evoking a birdhouse. The designs feature almost comically

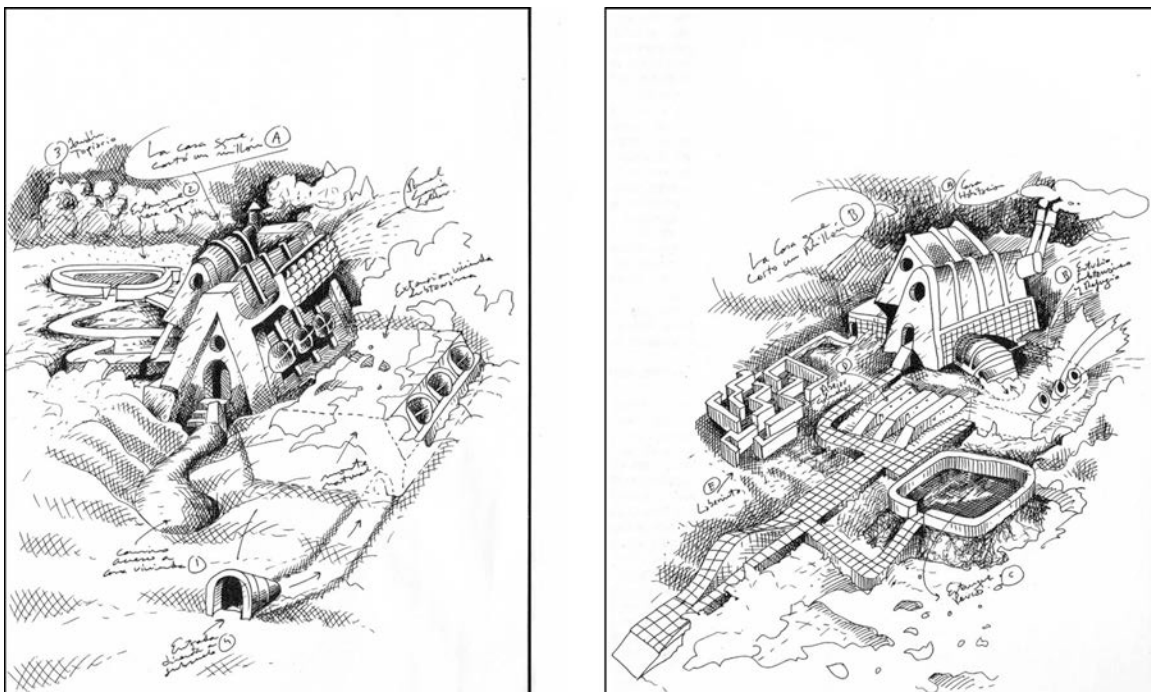


Fig. 4. Luis Benedit, *La casa que costó un millón* (A) and *La casa que costó un millón* (B), in Jorge Glusberg, *Sociosemiótica de la arquitectura* (Buenos Aires: Centro de Arte y Comunicación, 1978).

distorted technological forms complexly integrated with the topography of the site, depicting multilevel subterranean ‘refuge’ studios and circulation networks. Details such as generators, water purifiers, hydroponic orchards, and bee colonies connote survival and self-sufficiency, ultimately portraying a relationship between human and environment highly mediated by technology.²⁵

While Bénédict’s drawings suggest a science fiction dream for the future of *homo habitans*, Testa’s illustrations are quite different. They consist of various projections of a Doric column paired with over-scaled parts of the human body, each divided by standard dimensional notation, and other Greco-Roman architectural elements shown in conjunction with human figures (Fig. 5). Less obviously connected to the text, Testa’s drawings distinctly reference earlier Italian semiotic theory, such as Umberto Eco’s “Componential Analysis of the Architectural Sign /Column/” and the related interests in typology, Classical forms, and humanism that shaped postmodern architecture in the 1970s.²⁶

Of particular relevance to this paper, Glusberg distinguishes between the design project in drafted form and the built work of architecture in this essay, contrasting the signifying and communicating functions of each. Later in the text, Glusberg points out Testa’s projects for their ability to transcend the ordinary communicative intents and effects of construction documents and become aesthetic works in their own right.²⁷ These remarks attest to his interpretation of architectural drafting as a sign system and his consideration of its conceptual potential at the time of this publication. Although

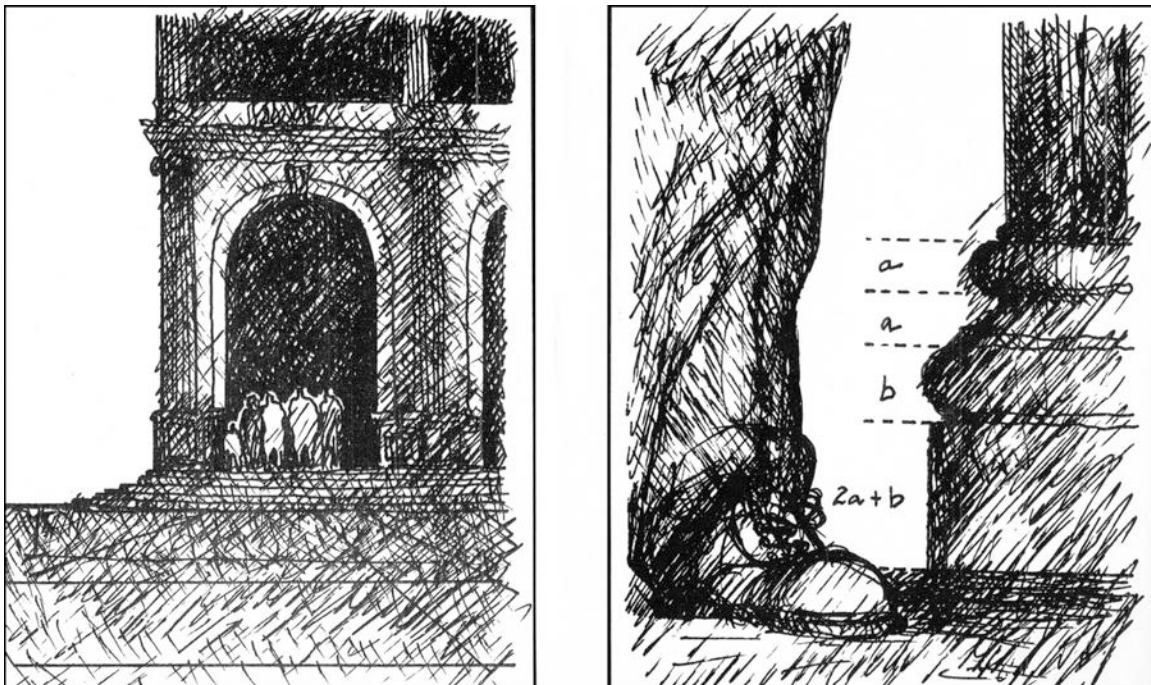


Fig. 5. Clorindo Testa, untitled illustrations in Jorge Glusberg, *Sociosemiótica de la arquitectura* (Buenos Aires: Centro de Arte y Comunicación, 1978).

Glusberg does not provide a direct explanation, we can conclude from his argument that this transcendence is effected by the *transgression* of conventional uses of drafting's iconic codes. This transgression permits the possibility of other meanings, and is therefore central to conceptual applications.²⁸

A second example, *Hacia una arquitectura topológica* (1977),²⁹ presents seven essays by Glusberg touching on semiotics, art, urbanism, ecology, and medieval cities; these are complemented by illustrations from Bedel, Bedit, and Testa.³⁰ Produced for an international conference of Latin American architects in Peru, the book's program for a 'topological architecture' reflects the environmental focus of this event.³¹

The illustrations include Bedel's pen and ink drawings of rocky landscapes with accentuated textures, and his site plan and aerial view of urban archaeological ruins (**Fig. 6, left**). Bedit provides sketches and hard lined drawings of habitats for mice, birds, and ants. Testa is represented by his sketch of a rat, shown in plan and elevation with dimensional notations (**Fig. 6, right**). The book also reproduces his conceptual architectural project *Habitar, trabajar, circular y recrearse*, portraying one man's daily activities within the confines of a restrictive urban environment.

Glusberg discusses the significance of Testa's rat in a subsequent book, formulating a concise semiotic analysis that clearly explains the conceptual use of architectural methods as critique. Describing the rat as a symbol of urban pestilence and the threats to *homo habitans*, Glusberg continues,

Testa transforms his architectural work, exalting the structural aspects in their relationship with the environment: the visual processing of space and the topological conception of this space lead him to produce icons of his professional activity. Art and architecture blend in an ecological melting pot, creating a work that goes beyond the conventional limits of either discipline. This phenomenon is exemplified by the two sketches of a rat, a top view, and a side view. The rat, encoded into architectural terms, acquires a design value. Architectural design is normally a way of representing how a future building will look. In this work, the rat represents the danger of death. In terms of its meaning, the work is a form of protest translated into a professional code.³²

Beyond shared semiotic methods and interpretations, the texts and illustrations in these books are also unified by common critical objectives. As postmodern architectural endeavors, they necessarily respond to the conditions of modernism.³³ Such responses in general involved the critique of *functionalism*—the root paradigm of architectural modernism—and its full manifestation in modernist urban planning, demonstrated par excellence in Latin America. These works—distinguished by the conceptualization of the relationship between human and environment as habitat, the satirical depiction of technology, the recollection of Classical humanism, the romanticization of medieval cities, and the attention to landscape and ecology—together mount a critique of modernism, its dehumanizing functionalism, its homogenizing urbanism, and its hostility to nature.

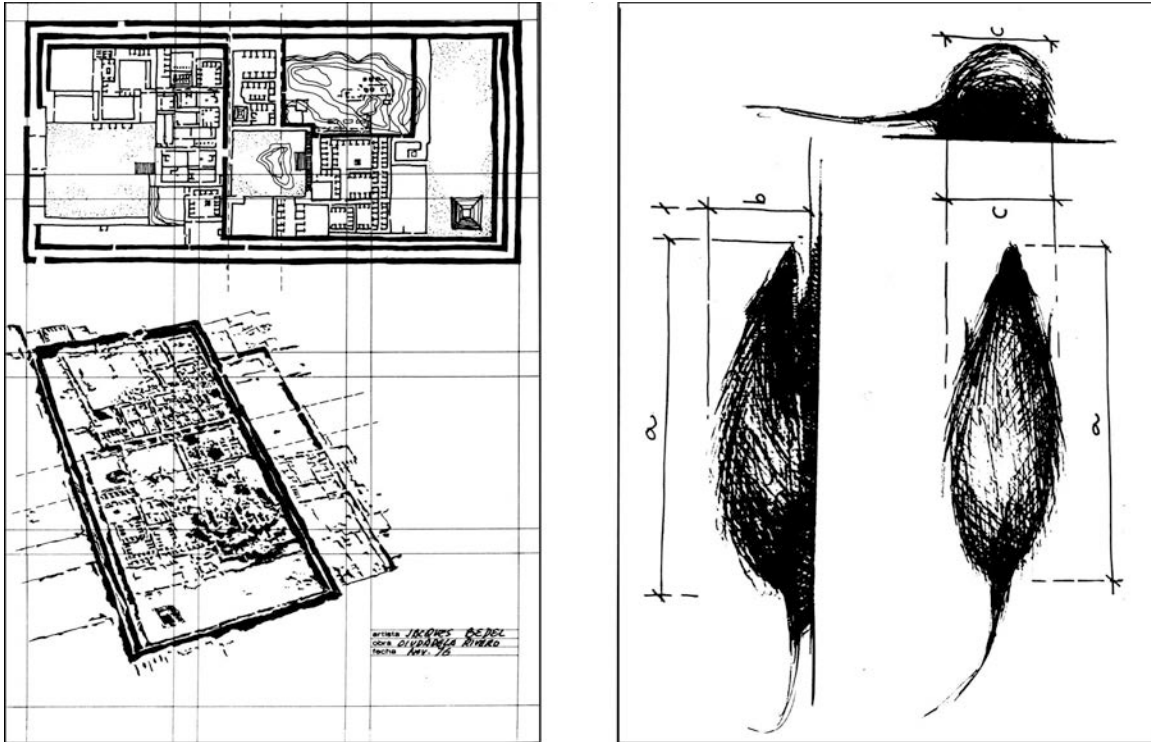


Fig. 6. (left) Jacques Bedel, *Ciudadela Rivero* (1976); (right) Clorindo Testa, untitled illustration [from *La peste en la ciudad* (1977)]; both in Clorindo Testa and Jorge Glusberg, *Hacia una arquitectura topológica* (Buenos Aires: Espacio Editora, 1977).

As a Latin American project, this work also critically unmasks European hegemony in the form of architectural modernism and other urban colonial enterprises. Glusberg later referred to Testa's *Habitar, trabajar, circular y recrearse* as a “criticism of ‘functionalism,’” connecting it to Le Corbusier, the Athens Charter,³⁴ and Brasilia.³⁵ Bedel's themes of landscapes and ruins were subsequently described by Glusberg as “a passionate comment on the forces that have acted upon nature in the Southern Hemisphere for millennia.... defend[ing]... Latin American heritage which has been seriously damaged by Spanish colonization and European culture.”³⁶

Architectural effects on media and methods of dissemination

Architectural influences are also discernible in the CAyC's media and methods of dissemination, as evidenced by a number of their exhibition and publication formats. In an early exhibit, *Hacia un perfil del arte latinoamericano* (1972), the group strategically employed architectural methods to surmount economic, political, and geographic constraints, creating an exhibition format based on a standard set of construction documents to facilitate the international distribution of their work. This format represented the conceptual projects of 67 artists³⁷ as plans—drawn and/or written out by the artist, then reproduced on large-scale heliographic sheets, or ‘blueprints’. These were organized with a conventional architectural title block in the lower right corner containing the name of the project, the artist, and the acronym “CAyC.” The entire exhibit was presented in a package of 148 sheets.³⁸

In the catalog, Glusberg reinforces this solution with theoretical justifications, centralizing the issue of identity. Describing the format as a response to “problems which are particularly Latin American,” Glusberg cites conditions of economic enslavement and ideological submission to the metropole; he concludes, “[t]his system, which is economic and easy to reproduce ... results from an impossibility of competition against technologies and economic possibilities still out of our reach.”³⁹ In an argument with semiotic foundations,⁴⁰ Glusberg links the “formal model of the exhibition” with art as “a phenomena of communication; [a] transmission of meanings.”⁴¹ He portrays the exhibit’s format and conceptual projects as directly aimed at subverting ideological structures; by laying bare their ‘constitutive codes’ and methods, they attempt real communication with the viewer, in opposition to ideological structures in which codes are hidden. According to Glusberg, the exhibition’s “political meaning is clear.”⁴²

This format was elaborated in subsequent exhibitions and publications, influencing the CAyC’s trademark graphic design. In a proliferation of bound catalogs and boxed sets of exhibit information cards, the construction documents were echoed in similarly standardized artist’s profiles. The work of a large number of conceptual artists, from Latin America and elsewhere, traveled extensively in multiple exhibits characterized by the increasingly recognizable format and style of the CAyC. As in the initial exhibit, organizing, legitimizing, and aestheticizing functions can be ascribed to this employment of architectural ‘language’—effective signifiers in the promotion of the CAyC’s carefully crafted image.

International architectural activities

Although extremely brief, a few relevant examples may serve to illustrate the international scope of the CAyC’s architectural involvement. Glusberg was a signatory to the *Carta de Machu Pichu* drafted by a handful of prominent Latin American architects in 1977.⁴³ A year later, he became a founding director of the International Committee of Architectural Critics (CICA), which had offices in Paris and within the CAyC’s headquarters.⁴⁴ The CAyC hosted this organization’s second international conference, which addressed architectural semiotic theory; titled *Es la arquitectura un lenguaje y en qué sentidos?*, the proceedings were published in a volume edited by Glusberg.⁴⁵ In 1985, the CAyC organized the first *Bienale de Arquitectura* in Buenos Aires, and continues to sponsor this ongoing international event.⁴⁶

Conclusions

In conclusion, I would like to raise two points regarding the consideration and contextualization of the CAyC, issuing from the research outlined in this paper. First, I suggest that the CAyC’s architectural influences not only stemmed from the balance of architects in the group, but were expressive of an existing, latent connection between art and architecture in 20th century Argentina and the region—a correspondence also based on theoretical foundations and shaped by transnational encounter.⁴⁷

This characteristic is apparent in the interdisciplinary practice and theory of the Taller Torres-García, and in the Concrete Art movement—especially Tomás Maldonado’s plural activities as an architect, painter, and theorist⁴⁸—of the 1930s and 40s. Argentina’s ties with Italy fostered the transmission of architect Bruno Zevi’s theories of space and the architectural research of Umberto Eco and the Italian semiotics

circle in the 1950s and 60s. By the late 60s, art critic and theorist Oscar Masotta (also a significant personage in the history of the DiTella) collaborated with architect Cesar Jannello to establish a research institute for art, architecture and semiotics at the Universidad de Buenos Aires.⁴⁹ Students of this program Diana Agrest and Mario Gandelsonas incorporated theoretical influences encountered in Paris and New York into work that famously brought architectural semiotics to international attention in the early 1970s. In this context, the CAyC's elision of art, architecture, and theory has traceable precedents, which complicate a view of this entity as a direct descendent of the DiTella Institute.⁵⁰

Secondly, I propose that the CAyC's architectural production not only distinguishes them in the field of Latin American conceptual art, but demands consideration from the perspective of architectural history. Their work is highly comparable with that of contemporaneous architectural collectives, e.g. Superstudio and Archigram, and the theoretical projects of Deconstructivism, all of which significantly advanced the idea that making architecture could be a critical act. The CAyC's endeavors are especially relevant in terms of recent studies examining a parallel history of conceptualism in art and architecture.⁵¹

Finally, this paper has intended to recognize the CAyC and its collective, collaborative practices as both product and agent of transnational encounter. Their work, distinguished by a intimate connection between art and architecture, demonstrates an interdisciplinary focus that gave rise to transdisciplinary forms—all the more representative of the CAyC's close negotiation of theory, methods, and form. Acknowledging the complex relationship between art and politics inherent in Latin American conceptualism, this paper also notes the need for further examination of the politically complicated case of the CAyC. However, limiting a discussion of the CAyC to these issues alone overlooks its particular transnational position, its formal experimentation, and its simultaneous participation in art and architectural discourses.

Notes

¹ Glusberg's long-enduring, and arguably domineering presence in the Argentine art scene has been characterized by controversy regarding a range of issues, including his family's ownership of a wealthy and powerful national corporation; rumors about ambiguous political involvements; ethical concerns including an accusation of art theft during his tenure as director of the *Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes* in the 1990s; and finally, the vocal rejection of his authority by younger generations of artists. Now elderly, he markedly withdrew from the public sphere several years ago.

² Glusberg has noted hundreds of such events in the 1970s alone; over the lifespan of the CAyC, these have ultimately numbered in the thousands.

³ Natalia Pineau discusses the foundations of the CAyC as a regional and international representative of the avant-garde, based on an examination of its early documentation. See her "El CayC: La reconstrucción de un programa institucional," in *ICAA Documents Project Working Papers*, No. 1, (Houston) September 2007: 25-30.

⁴ Mercedes Casanegra, "Between Silence and Violence," in *Entre el silencio y la violencia: Arte contemporáneo argentino* (Buenos Aires: ArteBA Fundación, 2004), 185.

⁵ Jorge Glusberg, *Art in Argentina* (Milan, Italy: Giancarlo Politi Editore, 1986), 20.

⁶ The architects (trained as and/or practicing) were Jacques Bedel, Luis Bénédict, Vicente Marotta, Julio Teich, Clorindo Testa, and Horacio Zabala. The work of Juan Carlos Romero suggests architectural training, but this is not confirmed. Alfredo Portillos was an industrial designer. The remaining artists were Gregorio Dujovny, Carlos Ginzburg, Jorge Gonzalez Mir, Victor Grippo, Leopoldo Maler, Luis Pazos, and Alberto Pellegrino. The balance of art and architecture in director Jorge Glusberg's activities is apparent in his curriculum vita (c. 1999), which can be accessed at http://1999.arqa.com/informa/cur_glus.htm

⁷ See, for example, Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007); Camnitzer's introduction and Mari Carmen Ramirez's chapter in Camnitzer et al., *Global Conceptualisms: Points of Origin 1950s-1980s* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999); Andrea Giunta, *Avant-garde, internationalism, and politics: Argentine art in the sixties* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); and Nelly Richard, *Margins and Institutions: Art in Chile since 1973* (Melbourne: Art & Text, 1986).

⁸ Iris Dressler and Hans D. Christ, "Introduction" in *Subversive Practices: Art Under Conditions of Political Repression/60s-80s/South America/Europe*, pp. 5-6, reader from exhibit at the Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, 2009. Forthcoming; currently available as **reader_eng_01.pdf** at <http://www.wkv-stuttgart.de/en/programme/2009/exhibitions/subversive/readertextsaudio/>

This highly relevant recent exhibit included work by several *Grupo Cayc* members representing Argentina, curated by Fernando Davis. Although architecture is not directly addressed, Davis' essay offers some interesting possibilities for comparison with the themes of this paper. See his "Political Bodies, Territories in Conflict," pp. 11-18 in the electronic document cited above.

⁹ Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation*, 35-36.

¹⁰ These definitions are drawn from work fundamental to semiotics: Ferdinand de Saussure's "Course in General Linguistics" and Roman Jakobson's "Linguistics and Poetics," both reprinted in Vincent Leitch, ed., *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (W.W. Norton, 2001).

¹¹ Another fascinating recent exhibit brings together works employing a multitude of notational systems—musical, scientific, and many others—with a special focus on conceptual art of the 1960s and 70s. This exhibit's approach complements the views in this paper. See ZKM Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe, *Notations: Kalkül und Form in den Künsten* (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 2008).

¹² Bénédict, Zabala, and Bedel were all architects who achieved greater recognition as artists. Of the three, Bedel was the most active as a practicing architect and in the production of 'real' architectural proposals. However, Bénédict designed the interior of the major Ruth Benzacar gallery in Buenos Aires, and both he and Bedel contributed to *Grupo* member Clorindo Testa's development of the *Centro Cultural Recoleta*.

¹³ Casanegra turns to this metaphor in very brief descriptions of Bénédict's and Zabala's work, but does not further develop it in *Entre el silencio y la violencia: Arte contemporáneo argentino*.

¹⁴ R. Martín Crossa, "Luis Bénédict," in *Arte de las Américas: el proyecto argentino*, 83-113 (New York: Baker and Co., 1992).

¹⁵ This image is further evoked by the presence of a human hand in photographs of the models.

¹⁶ These projects also suggest connections with Deconstructivist architectural theory. Benedit's habitats explore the interaction of bodies and space, in what architect Bernard Tschumi would characterize as the "violent" relationship that defines architecture. This interpretation of Benedit is intriguing in comparison to Fernando Davis' essay "Political Bodies, Territories in Conflict," cited in note 9, which interprets other CAyC artists' work in terms of bodies and space.

¹⁷ These works were also exhibited with the name *Proyectos para una arquitectura carcelaria*. They include *Cárcel flotante III*, *Carcel subterránea III*, (1973), and *Carcel sobre columna III* (1974).

¹⁸ María José Herrera makes similar observations, mentioning Jungian archetypes, Foucault, and Bentham's Panopticon in her essay "Este papel es una cárcel, un gesto fecundo," in *Horacio Zabala. Anteproyectos (1972-1978)*, 9-13 (Buenos Aires: Editorial Fundación Alon, 2007).

¹⁹ Quite relevant to this work as well as the rest of this paper, Fernando Davis offers an eloquent semiotic interpretation of Zabala's use of architectural codes in his "Poéticas críticas, representaciones opacas," in Herrera, *Horacio Zabala. Anteproyectos (1972-1978)*, 15-16.

²⁰ Jacques Bedel appears to be making drawings *as* architecture, clearly theoretical projects that come from the making of the drawing itself. Entirely conceptual, these works can be understood as architecture projects *about* architecture. In this way, they also presage Deconstructivist works.

²¹ Jorge Glusberg, *Sociosemiótica de la arquitectura* (Buenos Aires: Centro de Arte y Comunicación, 1978).

²² While also active as an artist, Testa was the most accomplished professional architect within the *Grupo*, and independently achieved international renown for built work in Buenos Aires such as the *Biblioteca Nacional* and the Bank of London-Buenos Aires.

²³ I have examined this connection at length in my previous paper, "'Sociosemiótica de la arquitectura' and Other Theories: The Role of Argentina in the Development of Architectural Semiotics," (unpublished).

²⁴ Glusberg's essay cites the influences of Greimas and Bachelard, and reflects ideas from Jakobsen, Marx, and Umberto Eco, among others.

²⁵ Benedit's work shares similarities with Archigram's futuristic habitats for human beings emphasizing the interface with a technologically accelerated world.

²⁶ See Umberto Eco, "A Componential Analysis of the Architectural Sign /Column/," *Semiotica* 5, no. 2 (1972): 97-117. These works by Testa also reflect the ideas of Aldo Rossi and the Venice School.

²⁷ Glusberg, *Sociosemiotica*, 83-85.

²⁸ Glusberg later provides a more technical, yet ultimately clearer, explanation of this process using semiotic disciplinary terminology in his *Art in Argentina*, 57-60.

²⁹ Clorindo Testa and Jorge Glusberg, *Hacia una arquitectura topológica* (Buenos Aires: Espacio Editora, 1977).

³⁰ The book also included illustrations by non-*Grupo* members Nicolas Uriburu and architect Rafael Viñoly, as well as a series of Glusberg's photographs of various surface textures in the urban environment: brick, cobblestone, metal grating, and molded concrete.

³¹ The back cover of the book identifies it as a "Propuesta para la Carta de Machu Pichu." This Charter was an anti-modernist document produced by Latin American architects at this conference as a critical response to the Athens Charter of CIAM, and is an historically significant theoretical work. It is reproduced in its entirety in Aldo Rossi, "The Charter of Macchu Picchu, Twenty-Five Years On," *L'Architettura* 48 (Dec. 2002): 798-803.

³² Glusberg, *Art in Argentina*, 58-59.

³³ This relationship has been notably analyzed by Frederic Jameson in his "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," also reprinted in Leitch, *Norton Anthology*.

³⁴ The Athens Charter is the well-known document outlining the principles of European modernist urban planning, reflecting the ideas of architect Le Corbusier, and produced by the *Congres Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM) in 1933.

³⁵ Glusberg, *Art in Argentina*, 59.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

³⁷ This was the first exhibit in which the *Grupo de los Trece* was officially identified. The remaining artists were mostly from various locations in Latin America, but a few were North American or European. A number of these artists also had architectural backgrounds.

³⁸ *Hacia un perfil del arte latinoamericano* has been carefully reconstructed in virtual form by the University of Iowa in an online exhibit, *Latin American Realities/International Solutions*, 1999. Every

sheet has been scanned and is accessible at <http://sdr.lib.uiowa.edu/cayc/caycintro.htm> See also the print catalog, Estera Milman, *Alternative Traditions in the Contemporary Arts: Subjugated Knowledges and the Balance of Power*, The University of Iowa Museum of Art, 1999.

³⁹ Jorge Glusberg, *Hacia un perfil del arte latinoamericano: muestra del Grupo de los Trece e invitados especiales* (Buenos Aires: Centro de Arte y Comunicación, 1972), n.p.

⁴⁰ Glusberg cites Althusser, Poulantzas, Gramsci, Marx, and Eco in this essay.

⁴¹ Ibid., n.p.

⁴² Ibid., n.p.

⁴³ See Rossi, "The Charter of Macchu Picchu, Twenty-Five Years On," cited in note 32.

⁴⁴ For details on the circumstances and participants in the founding of CICA in Mexico City, see the website <http://cicararchitecture.org/cica/found.htm>. See also *What is CICA? Who are its Members?* (Buenos Aires: Centro de Arte y Comunicación, n.d. [c. 1987]).

⁴⁵ Jorge Glusberg, ed., *Es la arquitectura un lenguaje y en qué sentidos? Anthology of conference proceedings from the II Encuentro Internacional de Criticos de Arquitectura, con el patrocinio de la Unión Internacional de Arquitectos (UIA)* (Buenos Aires: Centro de Arte y Comunicación, 1980).

⁴⁶ See the current biennial's website at <http://www.bienalba.com>

⁴⁷ This idea is supported by Jorge Francisco Liernur, who mentions some of these examples alongside others in his "Abstraction, Architecture, and the 'Synthesis of Arts' Debates in the Rio de la Plata, 1936-1956," in Carlos Brillembourg, ed., *Latin American Architecture 1929-1960: Contemporary Reflections*, (New York: Monacelli Press, 2004).

⁴⁸ Maldonado much later became an academic in Italy, where he engaged semiotics, including examinations of architecture. See his *Es la arquitectura un texto? y otros escritos* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Infinito, 2004).

⁴⁹ This program is discussed at length in C. Guerri, "Architectural Design and Space Semiotics in Argentina" in T. Sebeok and J. Umiker-Sebeok, eds., *The Semiotic Web 1987*, 389-419 (Berlin: Mouton, 1988).

⁵⁰ Overlaps between art and architecture are also apparent in subsequent work by Argentine artists, such as Leon Ferrari and Guillermo Kuitca.

⁵¹ See Nana Last, "Conceptualism's (Con)quests: On Reconceiving Art and Architecture," *Harvard Design Magazine*, no. 19 (2003): 14-21; and her "Function and Field: Demarcating Conceptual Practices" in Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung, eds., *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005). See also Mark Linder, *Nothing Less than Literal: Architecture after Minimalism* (MIT Press, 2004).

Erin Aldana

Transnational Interpretations of the Local: The Problem of *Abertura*-Period Art in Brazil
Abstract

During the period from 1978 to 1982, several groups of college-age youth performed urban interventionist works of art on the streets of São Paulo. The political context for this time period was *abertura*, or opening, during which the Brazilian government enacted a slow transition from military regime to democracy. The few articles that mention the urban interventions at all interpret them as part of an explosion of free expression occurring on the streets of São Paulo following the declaration of the end of censorship and amnesty for all political exiles that took place in 1979. While this reading complements a growing body of research linking conceptualism in Latin America to the rise of authoritarian regimes in the region, for various reasons, the art of the *abertura* period has remained absent from Brazilian art history. Somewhat paradoxically, the application of international models and theories actually make this work more comprehensible within its local context.

As ephemeral works of art lasting only a few hours, the urban interventions resonate within a highly specific place and time. However it is this same context that limits a wider understanding of this work. In contrast, Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* and the recent resurgence of interventionist art within an international context provide a theoretical framework for understanding the urban interventions that is lacking within a strictly Brazilian context. This paper analyzes the benefits and drawbacks of interpreting this highly localized artistic production of the *abertura* period according to international models.

Erin Aldana

Transnational Interpretations of the Local: The Problem of *Abertura*-Period Art in Brazil¹

During the period from 1978 to 1982, several groups of college-age youth performed urban interventions on the streets of São Paulo. These actions included the theft of a sculpture from storage and its reinstallation in the space underneath the São Paulo Museum of Art, the dropping of thousands of poetry leaflets from the tallest building in São Paulo, the Edificio Italia, and covering of the heads of monumental sculptures throughout the city with garbage bags. The political context for this time was *abertura*, or “opening,” a period (1979-1985) during which the Brazilian government enacted a slow transition from military regime to democracy. The few newspaper articles that mention the urban interventions at all interpret them as part of an explosion of free expression occurring on the streets of São Paulo following the declaration of the end of censorship and amnesty for all political exiles that took place in 1979. Demonstrations both by students protesting the military regime and metalworkers protesting unfair working conditions were an important aspect of this phenomenon. While this interpretation complements a growing body of research linking conceptualism in Latin America to the rise of authoritarian regimes in the region, for various reasons, the art of the *abertura* period has remained mostly absent from Brazilian art history.² Somewhat paradoxically, the application of international models and theories may actually make this work more comprehensible within its local context.

To illustrate my point, I would like to discuss a series of urban interventionist artworks that engaged with the empty space underneath MASP, the São Paulo Museum

of Art (Museu de Arte de São Paulo). In 1947, media magnate Assis Chateaubriand founded the museum, which remained in its original location in the center of São Paulo until 1968, when it moved to a new building on the Avenida Paulista.³ The building's unique design by Italian immigrant Lina Bo Bardi quickly made it one of the most distinguishable landmarks in a city famous for its lack of architectural character. It consisted of a long rectangle mounted on brackets that raised the structure off of the ground.⁴ This created an open space underneath, at times described as a "moment of silence" that formed the only "breathing space" on the skyscraper-choked Avenida Paulista, or a sort of "democratic agora" open to chance and indeterminacy, in the spirit of John Cage and Surrealism.⁵ This open space underneath the building was Bardi's concession to the site's original owner, who had stipulated that the space at the top of the hill and corresponding view not be disturbed. In her initial designs for MASP, Bardi included images of playground equipment and children, as well as tropical plants and reflecting pools at the brackets' bases. Today the brackets are painted bright red, creating a sharp visual contrast with the grayness of the rest of the city, although this did not occur until the mid-1980s. Prior to this time, the color red had strong associations with communism in Brazil and would not have been considered appropriate for an art museum. Inside the museum, the system of display that Bardi devised expressed a certain playfulness and lack of determinacy, for it involved hanging paintings on freestanding plexiglass panels that allowed the viewer to choose her own path through an art exhibition.

In spite of the whimsy with which Bardi envisioned MASP, or perhaps because of it, the space underneath the museum's new building also became the ideal location for the

military regime's frequent displays of authority. The opening of MASP at its new site was the source of much pomp and circumstance, with Queen Elizabeth II attending the ceremonies. In photographs of the event, the Queen's presence appears less remarkable than the sheer quantity of police and military accompanying her, as if her visit was merely a pretext for a military procession.⁶ In a similar fashion, celebrations of the sesquicentennial of Brazilian independence took place in the open space underneath MASP in 1972.⁷ Again, the choice of an art museum as the site of a military parade seems rather incongruous, at least at first glance. But what quickly becomes apparent from viewing photographs of the event is that the display constituted a possession of the space underneath MASP, a taking over of a site originally dedicated to playful exploration and indeterminacy. As anthropologist Roberto Da Matta argues in regard to the military parade, "The *street* and the *square* are taken away from the people and are turned over to the soldiers, who, armed and uniformed, now renew their ties of loyalty to the authorities."⁸

During the late 1970s, a series of urban interventionist artworks specifically targeted MASP. One of the first was the *Rouba da escultura* (Robbery of the Sculpture), which occurred in July 1979. In 1968, a group of Spanish exiles had commissioned artist/architect Flávio de Carvalho to produce a sculpture in commemoration of the anti-Fascist poet Federico García Lorca, which was installed in the Praça das Guianas in São Paulo in October of that year. Only a few months later, a right-wing paramilitary group, the Comando de Caças aos Comunistas (CCC, Anti-Communist Commando) destroyed the sculpture and placed the leftover fragments in storage, where they remained for ten

years.⁹ In July of 1979, a group of students affiliated with FAU, the Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo (Department of Architecture and Urbanism) at the University of São Paulo used false documents to enter the storage area, then “stole” the fragments of the sculpture and reassembled them in the empty space underneath MASP. Those involved with the *Robbery of the Sculpture* included editors of the student-produced journal *Cine Olho* (Cine-Eye), which included the now-famous film director Fernando Meirelles.¹⁰

The *Robbery of the Sculpture* infuriated MASP director Pietro Maria Bardi, who minced no words in expressing his dislike for the sculpture itself, which he referred to as “that crooked thing.”¹¹ Bardi explained that for him, the intervention was an act of piracy, as if someone had broken into his own house and vandalized his garden. He added that his feelings had nothing to do with Flávio de Carvalho himself, whose work he had exhibited at MASP in the early 1950s and who had been a friend of his for about twenty-five years, nor with García Lorca, whose work he admired. Rather, he considered the sculpture itself to be a joke, in keeping with the spirit of Carvalho’s interventions in which he wore a miniskirt in public, or angered the members of a Catholic religious procession by wearing a hat and walking the opposite direction.¹² Bardi argued that the work “resembled a cage” and that “it does not say anything, neither about García Lorca nor about Flávio de Carvalho.”¹³

Bardi’s response to the *Robbery of the Sculpture*, that he felt as if the perpetrators were vandalizing his own home, warrants further analysis. Indeed, perhaps so many young artists had targeted MASP because they saw that Bardi, whom Assis

Chateaubriand had personally picked and brought from Italy, was more than just a museum director, but also a paternal figure of sorts whose personality was inextricably linked to the museum, both through the architecture that his wife Lina Bo had designed and in the collection itself. In addition to being director of MASP, he was a prolific publisher and produced the first attempt at a comprehensive history of Brazilian art, in addition to several books on MASP's history and many of the artists associated with its collections.¹⁴ The fact that Bardi, along with much of the collection of MASP, was not Brazilian was a further point of contention for the members of Cine Olho, who associated Bardi with "those who want to import an aesthetic-ideological model on everyone... A man like him is nostalgic for classical architecture, of a numeric and perfect order, pure Aryanism, a mirror of Beauty."¹⁵ The group went on to speculate that Bardi thought of them and the sculpture as the others, and as imperfect monsters. According to this quotation, the members of Cine Olho associated the preference for international "perfect" art over local "imperfect" art with authoritarian sentiments in the cultural realm.¹⁶ In fact, MASP's original founder, Assis Chateaubriand had his own connections to the military regime, having earned a certain degree of notoriety for his support of its rise to power in 1964 because he thought it would be good for business.¹⁷

The theories of Roberto Da Matta, who wrote his analysis of Brazilian society during the military regime, *Carnivals, Rogues and Heroes*, and first published it in Brazil in 1979, provide tools for understanding the relationship between MASP/Bardi and the urban interventions/young artists. In a section entitled, "Two Basic Social Domains: The House and the Street," Da Matta argues that the house and the street create two opposing

forces that “can be a powerful tool in analyzing the Brazilian social world” namely that “The street is to lack of control and mixing with a multitude of persons as the house is to control and authoritarianism.”¹⁸ Da Matta views the house as a space in which hierarchical relationships dominate: father/ son and other bonds of kinship, patron-client, or others based on the concepts of respect and consideration. Conversely, the street is the site of *malandragem*: “the basic rule of the street is deceit, deception and roguery ...the Brazilian art of using ambiguity as a tool for living.”¹⁹ Far from viewing the ideas of house and street as mutually exclusive, Da Matta provides examples in which a continuum, or blending exists. One is the house itself, which is divided into public and private areas, and the city, in which one’s own street can be considered as an extension of a residence, or the public plaza, or central square, which in traditional Brazilian culture becomes like an extension of the living room into public space. Given this interpretation, the idea that the museum was somehow Bardi’s “house” was not entirely inaccurate. Whether intentionally or not, both Bardi and MASP represented authoritarian sentiments as manifested within the cultural realm, and therefore ideal targets for young, college-age artists. The urban interventions, performed in the public space of the street, the site of chaos, roguery, and lack of control, contrasted with and undermined the authority that MASP, as “house” of both Bardi and a certain type of Brazilian art, represented.

In addition to the previously mentioned *Robbery of the Sculpture* of Cine Olho, several other urban interventions of the late 1970s had featured MASP prominently. In *X-Galeria*, an intervention in which the members of the group 3Nós3 taped giant Xs across the doorways of art galleries in São Paulo, MASP was the only museum they targeted.²⁰

The members of the group *Viajou Sem Passaporte* (Traveled Without a Passport) left a bucket full of concrete in the space under MASP along with the message “Quem deixou esta Bardi aqui?” (Who left this bucket/ Bardi here?).²¹ In an unrelated incident, a candidate for mayor vandalized MASP in 1982, writing campaign slogans on the low wall that surrounded the museum. Bardi protested the defacement of the building by painting the word “MERDA” in giant red letters over the advertisement. Articles explained that a law enacted in 1982 making graffiti illegal would have sent Bardi to jail if not for his age: he was eighty-two at the time, and since the age of seventy, would not have been held criminally responsible for his actions. “If I had known that earlier, I would have made a more energetic protest” he replied.²² He also maintained that his reaction was an aesthetic protest against those who would dirty a monument of artistic patrimony.²³ In short, Bardi represented the *caxias*, or authoritarian figure in relation to the numerous *malandros* who comprised the artist groups of São Paulo.

In September of 1979, the members of the artist group 3Nós3 chose to perform their intervention *Interdição* (Interdiction), right outside of MASP. Mimicking the actions of street vendors, the members of 3Nós3 unfurled a sheet of blue plastic cellophane across the Avenida Paulista near MASP and when the light turned green simply stood there, waiting for the motorists to respond. Ramiro explained in a newspaper article documenting the intervention, “Many of them [the motorists] stayed there, looking at me, asking me what they should do, if they should cross the strip or not. And I replied to them, “You, sir, are the one who knows the answer.”²⁴ After a few seconds, the driver of the first car took the initiative and drove through the strip of plastic, breaking it in half.²⁵

In doing so, the intervention *Interdição* made passersby the central participants in the scene, giving them the choice of what to do, and literally stopped the normal orderly flow of traffic on the busy street. Given the fact that the military had on several previous occasions quite visibly displayed their control over the site, this intervention constituted an open flaunting of the rules and a subversion of roles normally held by people in positions of authority. The members of 3Nós3 thus played the role of *malandros*, or tricksters, causing mischief and even chaos with their interventions into the pre-established order of daily life in the city.

The *malandro* is a concept that does not quite translate into English. He is often described as a rogue, bad-boy, or even petty thief, and plays an integral role in the construction of Brazilian cultural identity. Da Matta associates *malandros* with carnival, an inversion of order, and marginal people, while others connect them with violence, crime and the chaotic forces of the street:

The rogue is a being out of place, dislocated from the formal rules that govern the social structure, relatively excluded from the labor market—indeed, we define and represent him as one totally averse to work and highly individualized in his typical way of walking, his seductive mode of speaking, and his singular dressing.²⁶

The rogue occupies an equally complex social space, ranging from the simple act of shrewdness of which anyone is capable to the pointed jabs of the real professional. The social field covered by the rogue goes in a gradation from his typical gesture, the roguery that is socially approved and positively regarded as a manifestation of skill and liveliness, to acts that are downright dishonest. When this happens, the rogue ceases to make a living by means like the *jeito* and clever dodges and instead he becomes an authentic marginal or bandit.²⁷

Da Matta articulates an idea that is missing from many other characterizations of the *malandro*: the idea that anyone who survives by means of the *jeito*, or clever dodge, can

be one, not just the street kids and petty thieves commonly associated with the term. He places the malandro in opposition to the *caxias* (one who always follows the rules, no matter what they are) and the religious visionary (who rejects society completely) as forming three main characters central to the understanding of Brazilian cultural identity.

Michel de Certeau's analysis of how surreptitious forces function in the space of the city provides a model for viewing the activities of the malandro within a specifically urban context. In the introduction to *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau explains his concepts of "strategy" and "tactic," associating strategy with "force-relationships," power, and the place of "the proper." In contrast, "A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance."²⁸ De Certeau associates a number of everyday practices such as walking, talking, cooking, etc. with the tactical because of the degree to which they involve "clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things... polymorphic situations, joyful discoveries..."²⁹ In this way, the idea of the tactical lends itself to associations with artistic actions such as the urban interventions. In his chapter on "Walking in the City," de Certeau inserts disruptive tactics into the authoritarian space of the city:

The language of power is in itself 'urbanizing,' but the city is left prey to contradictory movements that counterbalance and combine themselves outside the reach of panoptic power. The city becomes the dominant theme in political legends, but it is no longer a field of programmed and regulated operations. Beneath the discourses that ideologize the city, the ruses and combinations of powers that have no readable identity proliferate; without points where one can take hold of them, without rational transparency, they are impossible to administer.³⁰

We can see how this quotation might apply to the intervention *Interdição*, which has a strong formal similarity to the activities of street vendors. A group of three or four men,

all dressed in the same color, carry a banner made of plastic that is mounted on sticks. When the light turns red, the men cross the street and hold up the banner for motorists to read. When the light turns green, they return to one side of the street and allow cars to pass. This is just one of a multitude of examples of “visual pollution” or instances in which advertisements blatantly disregard both the law and the viewer’s ability to absorb a finite amount of information at any given time.³¹

The title of *Interdição* means “closure” or “injunction” in Portuguese; an “interdição de direitos humanos” for instance is a removal of civil rights. It suggests that the members of 3Nós3 had taken it upon themselves to close the street, and left it up to motorists to decide how long it should remain closed. In this way, the temporary, tactical intervention counteracted and undermined the authority embodied both in the more permanent work of architecture, and the parades and other manifestations of military power performed at its location. We might not necessarily think to associate MASP with authoritarian sentiments at first glance. However, the fact that it so often played a crucial role in military parades, coupled with the regime’s own emphasis on transforming Brazil into a modern, progressive country through construction, especially through projects that focused on the city of São Paulo, support this argument.

The contrast between the concept of art as manifested in *Interdição* and the works of art housed inside MASP was made apparent in an exchange described in the same newspaper article. The reporter described how, just as the members of 3Nós3 were stretching their plastic across the Avenida Paulista, a group of about thirty students from a local *colégio* (junior high) were arriving for a class: Moral and Civic Education. Just the

title of the class suggests that even art education did not escape the indoctrination of the military government. The reporter asked the professor teaching the class what she thought of the intervention. She replied, “In MASP, students admire works of art, although I sometimes wish the collection had more works of art by Brazilian artists... But this manifestation in the street—they [the students] really are not understanding any of it. They come and ask me about it and I do not understand it either.”³² The teacher’s response to *Interdição* became something of a journalistic trope in response to the urban interventions, which were documented in large part through newspaper articles that described them as events of local interest, rather than as works of art. After having expressed her dissatisfaction with the lack of Brazilian artists in MASP’s collection, the teacher then admitted her inability to understand the work of Brazilian art taking place on the street outside the museum. The implication is that the urban intervention failed in its attempts to connect with its audience and by extension, that, unlike the works of art located within the museum, it was unworthy of any serious further consideration.

Thus the urban interventionist art of the *abertura* period in Brazil has occupied a place from which it seems difficult to escape. While these works of art drew a large part of their meaning from the highly specific site and time period in which they were created, many of the people who would have understood and appreciated this context repeatedly expressed their lack of understanding of the interventions.³³ The use of theories developed by a Brazilian anthropologist, Roberto Da Matta, may help clarify the relationship between site and intervention in many of these works, but they do little to legitimize them. In spite of the emphasis on performance and the ephemeral in Brazilian

art, which goes back at least as far as Ferreira Gullar's 1961 essay "Theory of the Non-Object," the urban interventions have largely evaded the interest of local art historians. Art critics in Brazil have for the most part not taken them seriously and have considered them as little more than childish pranks. They therefore represent something of a paradox regarding their interpretation along national vs. transnational models.

Although the works were produced for a highly specific place and time, the recent resurgence of interventionist art may provide a framework for making the urban interventions comprehensible that is lacking within a strictly Brazilian context. Over the past few years, possibilities for situating the urban interventions of the late 1970s as the precursors of the more recent international interventionist art of the past ten years have certainly developed. In 2005, an exhibition sponsored by the Henry Moore Institute included the urban interventions of 3Nós3 as examples of Brazilian sculpture.³⁴ This was a highly fluid definition of the term sculpture, for it also included the more recent interventions of the *paulista* artist Eduardo Srur. That same year, an exhibition in Kassel, Germany featured the work of 3Nós3 as examples of "Collective Creativity" that also included the now-famous Argentinean work *Tucumán Arde*. In addition, a recent explosion of interest in graffiti and urban interventionist art may further clear a path for the interventionists of the 1970s to enter the mainstream.³⁵

But we must ask what is lost and what is gained in using international art movements and European theory to describe Brazilian works of art. Certainly the gains could be substantial, for they involve the legitimization of a movement that art critics had previously dismissed as a complete waste of time. However, what is lost in this process

is the sense of local significance that gave these works their power in the first place. As temporary works of art installed in urban space that exist today in the fragmentary forms of newspaper articles, photographs, and rapidly fading memories, there is something about the urban interventions that remains inaccessible to us today. Then there are the issues of importance. Would it ever be possible to value the urban interventions as works of art in and of themselves, or are they only important to the degree that one is able to connect them to international artistic trends? The use of European theory to analyze these works makes them more comprehensible to a wider audience and gives them a resonance beyond the time and place that the works originally occurred. While Roberto Da Matta's ideas of the *malandro*, or trickster, and *caxias*, or authoritarian square also describe the relationship between the urban interventions and structures of authority, these models would not resonate within larger circles. Without the legitimizing force of the theories of de Certeau and the recent resurgence of interventionist art, would the works of the late 1970s simply remain in obscurity as it has for the past thirty years?

The transnational is a paradoxical force in regard to the art of this time period, for the application of European theory rescues the interventions from the obscurity to which their local context had condemned them. However, it is worth remembering that, like the urban interventions, a great many artists and movements in the history of Latin American art remain to be analyzed and may have already been forgotten or cast aside because of their largely local frames of reference, which resist easy incorporation into the transnational model.

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¹ This article expresses many ideas that are originally published in my doctoral dissertation. See Erin Aldana, "Interventions into Urban and Art Historical Spaces: The Work of the Artist Group 3Nós3 in Context, 1979-1982" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2008). All translations from the original Portuguese are my own, unless otherwise stated.

² For more on the idea of a uniquely Latin American form of conceptualism, see Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), and Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960-1980," in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, ed. Philomena Mariani (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999). Only a few art historical texts from Brazil even mention the activities of 3Nós3, the interventionist group most associated with the visual arts. These include the following: Aracy A Amaral, "Aspectos do não-objetualismo no Brasil (1981)," in *Arte e meio artístico: entre a feijoada e o x-burguer (1961-1981)* (São Paulo: Nobel, 1983), 376-90, Cristina Freire, *Poéticas do Processo: Arte Conceitual no Museu* (São Paulo: Editora Iluminuras Ltda., 1999), 23-8, Walter Zanini, *História Geral da Arte no Brasil*, vol. 2 (São Paulo: Instituto Walther Moreira Salles, Fundação Djalma Guimarães, 1983), 785-88.

³ Prior to 1968, MASP was located in the Galeria Prestes Maia, in the center of São Paulo.

⁴ The original site had been donated to the São Paulo City Council with the provision that the view of the city from the Trianon Park (across the street) never be obstructed. The brackets today are painted bright red, but this did not occur until after the fall of the military regime.

⁵ Olivia de Oliveira, "MASP (São Paulo Art Museum), São Paulo," *Nexus: International Architectural Review*, no. 23-4 (2004): 60-1.

⁶ Photographs of Queen Elizabeth's visit to Brazil and participation in the inauguration of the new building of MASP can be found in Pietro Maria Bardi, *40 anos de MASP* (São Paulo: CREFISUL, 1986), 130-1.

⁷ Photographs of a military parade concluding in the space underneath MASP during the sesquicentennial of Brazilian independence are reproduced in the plates section of Elio Gaspari, *A Ditadura Escancarada* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2002).

⁸ Roberto Da Matta, *Carnivals, Rogues and Heroes: An Interpretation of the Brazilian Dilemma*, trans. John Drury (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 78.

⁹ Maria do Carmo Fernandes, “O resgate de Lorca,” *Folhetim*, July 1, 1979, 11.

¹⁰ Meirelles became internationally famous for directing the films *City of God* and *The Constant Gardener*. According to former group member Raghy, his brother was one of the many members of *Viajou Sem Passaporte* who drifted in and out of the group. Raghy said that because the members were always changing, he could not remember who most of them were. Although newspaper articles documenting the *Robbery of the Sculpture* refer to the group as *Cine Olho*, after the journal they founded, members of the artist groups that I spoke to used the name *Olhar Eletrônico*, or “Electronic Gaze.”

¹¹ “P.M. Bardi odeia ‘essa coisa torta’,” *Folha de São Paulo*, June 26, 1979, 29. The translated title of this article is “P.M. Bardi hates ‘that crooked thing.’”

¹² The members of 3Nós3 considered these performances by Carvalho, *Experiencia no. 2* (1931) and *New Look* (1956) as examples of early urban interventions. For more information on these two performances, see Luiz Camillo Osorio, *Flávio de Carvalho* (São Paulo: Cosac & Naify Edições, 2000), 19-20, 43-44.

¹³ “P.M. Bardi odeia ‘essa coisa torta’,” 29.

¹⁴ Bardi wrote dozens of books on the history of Brazilian art; perhaps among the most important was his two-volume comprehensive history of Brazilian art published in 1979, several years before Walter Zanini’s similar project published in 1983.

¹⁵ Fernandes, “O resgate de Lorca,” 11.

¹⁶ The implication was that international artistic trends were attempts to improve Brazilian culture by Europeanizing it, in addition to viewing such a desire as evidence of an authoritarian way of thinking. This argument had been used by the Left throughout the history of Brazilian art to criticize everything from the modernism of the 1920s to geometric abstraction, the establishment of museums of modern art in Brazil, and the advent of the São Paulo Biennial. For more on the history of these debates in regard to the visual arts, see Aracy Amaral, *Arte para quê? A preocupação social na arte brasileira, 1930-1970* (São Paulo: Nobel, 1984).

¹⁷ Assis Chateaubriand had been a well-known supporter of the military government and came to represent the capitalistic interests behind the regime to such an extent that film director Glauber Rocha included a businessman/ villain character based on Assis Chateaubriand in his 1967 film *Terra em Transe* (Land in a Trance/ Land in Anguish), a fictionalized and allegorical account of the rise of authoritarianism in Brazil. See Randal Johnson, *Cinema Novo x 5* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), 137. Johnson explains that the character of Júlio Fuentes in the movie *Terra em transe* was based equally on the figures of Assis Chateaubriand and Júlio Mesquita, owner of the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo*. Both Assis Chateaubriand and Mesquita had supported the overthrow of João Goulart in 1964.

¹⁸ Da Matta, *Carnivals, Rogues and Heroes*, 64.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 64-5.

²⁰ “Um protesto contra o comércio da arte. No meio da noite,” *O Estado de São Paulo*, July 3, 1979, 14. The name 3Nós3 is a pun in Portuguese, meaning “3 knots/we three” and referring to the three group members, as well as the idea that they were three knots in

the line of Brazilian art, or three of something irritating. I would like to thank Tadeu Chiarelli for sharing this observation with me.

²¹ Interview with Roberto “Beto” Melo, August 2006. The joke involves a pun in Portuguese since the name “Bardi” sounds like the word for “bucket” (baude) spoken with a thick *caipira* or country accent. The bucket was heavy enough that no one moved it for several days.

²² See “Arte na polícia: O diretor do Museu sai em sua defesa,” *Veja*, Oct. 20, 1982, 23, “O pichador condenado,” *Jornal da Tarde*, Nov. 19, 1987, 3. The politician, Jair Andreoni, was the first to be sentenced to two months of jail, a fine, and court fees, for continually vandalizing monuments, walls, bridges, and tunnels with his campaign slogans over the course of several years. Andreoni argued that he felt singled out for punishment, since he could remember politicians writing their campaign slogans on walls when he was a child. This practice seems to have not really been a problem in São Paulo until the mid-1980s, when the explosion in graffiti occurred. For example, a series of articles from Hudinilson’s archive that I did not scan dealt with the problem of mayoral candidate Jânio Quadros shamelessly vandalizing the city with his campaign slogans, in flagrant disrespect of anti-graffiti laws.

²³ “Arte na polícia,” 23.

²⁴ “E, de repente, a Paulista está fechada por papel celofane,” *Jornal da Tarde*, Sept. 22, 1979, 2.

²⁵ A precursor in this regard can be found in an intervention that the Pernambucan artist Paulo Bruscky performed in 1973, in which he closed off a bridge in the city of Recife for forty minutes with a long strip of pink material. Bruscky had a team of assistants film and photograph the intervention, “capturing copious amounts of footage of people swearing and making obscene gestures.” “Gente,” *Veja*, April 11, 1973. The photocopy of the article in Hudinilson’s archive includes a handwritten and somewhat illegible note from Bruscky.

²⁶ Da Matta, *Carnivals, Rogues and Heroes*, 209.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 214. Here the Portuguese word *malandro* is translated as “rogue,” a choice that I believe attempts to incorporate the range of meanings that Da Matta attributes to the word.

²⁸ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), xix.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

³¹ Every time motorists stop at a red light, street vendors come out and ply their trade. Some drape small bags of stickers, gum, or candy over the rear view mirrors of cars. If no one pays for these, they quickly remove them as the lights turn green. These people, often destitute children forced into work by their parents, juggle balls and sticks in hopes that they will impress a motorist enough to receive some money. The example of a team of men carrying banners on sticks is not something that I have seen very often, usually only near the metro station Ana Rosa, yet it became crucial to my understanding of *Interdição*. Since the banner men are hired by real estate companies, they are in a slightly different

category than the street vendors, who are self-employed and often deal in pirated compact discs, fake designer clothing and handbags, and other black market items. The problem of “visual pollution” has plagued São Paulo for decades. See *São Paulo: a cidade, o habitante, a administração* (São Paulo: Prefeitura do Município de São Paulo, 1979), Giovanni Gerolla, “Cidade Limpa,” *Arquitetura & Urbanismo* (September 2007): 64-9.

³² “E, de repente, a Paulista está fechada por papel celofane,” 2. An article reproduced in *The Brazil Reader* explains that schools were forced to teach “citizenship education” during the military regime. The fostering of nationalist sentiments through advertising and propaganda reached its height during the early to mid-1970s. See Grupo da Educação Moral e Cívica, “The Maximum Norm of the Exercise of Liberty,” in *The Brazil Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, ed. Robert M. Levine and John J. Crocitti (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 258-9. The fact that a field trip to MASP would be included as part of such a class only adds to a growing understanding of the role that this museum played as a cultural symbol of military authority during the 1970s.

³³ I discuss this phenomenon in much more depth in chapters two and four of my dissertation.

³⁴ Penelope Curtis, and Stephen Feeke, ed., *Espaço Aberto/Espaço Fechado: Sites for Sculpture in Modern Brazil*, (Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 2005).

³⁵ *Kollektive Kreativität/ Creative Collectivity* (Frankfurt: Revolver, 2005), Nato Thompson, and Gregory Sholette, eds, *The Interventionists: Users' Manual for the Creative Disruption of Everyday Life* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 2004).

Erin Aldana is an art historian specializing in modern and contemporary Latin American art. In 2008, she completed her dissertation on the Brazilian artist group 3Nós3, which performed urban interventionist art projects on the streets of São Paulo from 1979-1982. She has worked at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, the J. Paul Getty Museum, and the Blanton Museum of Art in Austin, Texas. She has taught courses on Latin American, Mexican, and Chicano/ Latino art at Southwestern University, the University of Texas at Austin, and the University of California, San Diego. Her published essays include examples in *The Geometry of Hope: Latin American Abstract Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection* and *The Blanton Museum of Art Guide to the Latin American Collection*. She is a recipient of the FLAS (Foreign Language and Area Studies) fellowship in Portuguese and the College Art Association Professional Development Fellowship. She is currently revising her dissertation into a book manuscript.

**Imagined Encounters: Exporting a Situationist model of Revolution and Aesthetics
to Latin America**

By: Elize Mazadiego

for

Transnational Latin American Art International Research Forum for Graduate Students
and Emerging Scholars

at

University of Texas at Austin
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In 1998 Blake Stimson interviewed Luis Camnitzer regarding his then-current book project *Dematerialization and Resistance: The Use and Misuses of Conceptualism in Latin American Art*. Here Camnitzer reveals that in the process of gathering material for this book he found a note he had written in 1970 that read “Dada – Situationism/Tupamaros – Conceptualism.” Unfortunately, he does not elaborate on the specifics of this relationship in this interview. Not until 2007, with the publication of his book *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation*, does Camnitzer explain his pairing of the Situationists in France with the Tupamaro guerilla movement in Uruguay, and its larger relationship to Dada and Conceptualism.

In an effort to define the Tupamaros’ protests as “Situationist” actions, he attempts to locate these two collectives along an axis of aestheticized activism. Camnitzer recognizes that the Situationists were virtually unknown in Latin America in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but he justifies his linking of them with the Tupamaros on the basis of their similar pursuit of a “liberation of the people” via creative political practice. Additionally, he explains how these two movements influenced the artistic avant-garde. It is worth noting that Camnitzer makes such a conjecture as early as 1970, later incorporating it into his analysis of Conceptualism in Latin America.

This paper explores Luis Camnitzer’s construction of this relationship and interrogates the implications of such a gesture. While he attempts to assemble the Situationists International and the Tupamaros under a common formal or conceptual category, they are never in real conversation with each other. Thus, I explore the nature of his historical enterprise and the interpretative significance of such a pairing. I question the value, and potential problem in making such a connection, particularly as it relates to

the ways in which we want to write and think about transnational Latin American art, and its potential dialogue with Europe. Furthermore, I will consider how a reading of the Tupamaros through Situationism can be applied to the interpretation of late 1960s and 70s aesthetic practices in Latin America, and specifically to Tucumán Arde in Argentina. I intend to address the question of how does this configuration mirror and perpetuate the art historical discourse of avant-garde practices that stems from May '68 and how effective is the export of such a model?

Didactics of Liberation

Luis Camnitzer's recent publication *Conceptualism in Latin America: Didactics of Liberation* is part of a larger discourse that is concerned with retracing Conceptual art's trajectory across multiple circuits versus a single path. In *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, historian Alexander Alberro identifies a "complexity of genealogical strands and avant-garde strategies" within the category of Conceptualism.ⁱ Thus, he suggests that this movement does not stem from a single source or region, but is rather a series of heterogeneous practices and theories. As part of this effort to complicate Conceptualism's history, artist Luis Camnitzer and curator Mari Carmen Ramirez highlight Latin America's contribution to this discourse. In *Global Conceptualisms: Points of Origins*, they argue that artists in Latin America participated in a type of Conceptualist art that, similar to its U.S. and European counterparts, critiqued "both the fetishization of art and its systems of production and distribution in late capitalist society," and yet directed much of its energy towards larger social and political structures.ⁱⁱ According to Ramirez, we can distinguish Latin America's version of Conceptualism based on artists' desire to transform the public at large and, not merely cultural institutions.

The outstanding feature of the conceptual avant-garde was that merging of art and politics into a socio-artistic project of emancipation, that is, a project in which the creation of new forms of art would go hand in hand with the hypothetical transformation of everyday life and the construction of an alternative society.ⁱⁱⁱ

This impulse was oriented in part by artists' responses to local social, cultural and political contexts, such as the erratic achievements and failures of the project of modernization and the rise of authoritarian military regimes in countries like Chile, Argentina and Brazil. This climate incited a fundamental shift that politicized and radicalized Latin America's artistic avant-garde in the 1960s and 70s. Where art and politics coalesced as part of a strategic effort to foster revolution.

Luis Camnitzer defines Latin American Conceptualism on the basis of its disinterest in "style" and its commitment to political strategies.^{iv} Interestingly, his publication *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* is an attempt to assign Latin America's avant-garde its own historical framework, rooting it in its own traditions rather than defining it as a mere deviation from U.S. or European models. He describes the Uruguayan Tupamaro guerrilla movement as representing an early synthesis of aesthetics and politics, and the initial disintegration of the divide between art and life. Camnitzer repeatedly couples the Tupamaros with the French Situationists. First, in the 1970 scrap of paper which registers a sequence of movements that are loosely connected across history, and second in the subsequent detailing of their parallel trajectories in his first and last chapters.

"Dada-situationism-Tupamaros-conceptualism."^v

Although, Camnitzer seemingly abandons this construction along with his belief in "one seamless global history," he employs the Situationist International (S.I.) as an archetype

by which we can postulate that the Tupamaros were precursors to Latin America's Conceptual art. In doing so, Camnitzer perpetuates the recuperation of the S.I. into art history, but more importantly weaves the S.I. into Latin American artistic narratives. The metaphor of *Salpicar*, to splash or sprinkle, best describes Camnitzer's methodology.

Events that seem haphazardly scattered in history, somehow connected, but not necessarily having a casual relation between them. *Salpicón* is a form of identifying shared postures, primarily in the context of underdeveloped areas versus developed centers, respecting the different sequences of events and the speed this context generates.^{vi}

In other words, he is interested in mapping out affinities between Europe and Latin America that express a conceptual dialogue, but any actual dialogue is historically dubious. In doing so, however, he compromises his original objective to discuss Latin American Conceptualism on its own terms, within its own history and fails to provide a framework that foregrounds some form of local development.

On the other hand, this strategy legitimates Latin American art history by linking it, however tangentially, to a Western paradigm that possesses cultural cachet within the field. Time and again Latin Americanists waver between embracing or rejecting any relationship that may exist between the so-called "center" and "periphery." Camnitzer's own shift back and forth exemplifies this curious tension. His approach is effective because it reflects a transnational dialogue regardless of whether it was specific to the Situationists or the Tupamaros. Such a conversation operates on the level of Camnitzer's own global encounters and exchange, which facilitate these grand connections. Moreover, it reinforces the general notion that both Situationism and Conceptualism are part of an "international cultural exchange."^{vii} For McKenzie Wark, the recent flood of scholarship on the Situationists recuperates them to another cultural context, in this case

Latin American conceptualism, to guarantee value on both ends of the cultural spectrum.

What are, however, the specifics of the Situationist citation in Camnitzer's work?

Situationists and Tupamaros: From Art to Revolution

In Uruguay during the 1950s, Camnitzer questioned the function and efficacy of art to produce social change, particularly because conventional artistic production and meaning remained distant from everyday realities. With the emergence of the Tupamaros in the mid-1960s Camnitzer identified a contemporary political intervention that verged on artistic creation. The Tupamaros, also known as the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional (MLN), virtually achieved a "practice" that blended art and politics, and thus art and life. Camnitzer characterizes many of the early Tupamaros' actions as "theatrical" due to their spectacular nature within urban spaces. While the guerillas strategically publicized their actions or rerouted media communication to broadcast their subversive messages, Camnitzer imagines the actions of the Tupamaros as constituting a type of political action tinged with aesthetic qualities. He ostensibly reiterates French theorist Régis Debray who also considered the guerrilla group a "cultural phenomenon" that generated actions much like the S.I.'s *psychogeography*.

There is no traveling dogma, no revolutionary strategy independent of the conditions determined by the place and time; everything is to be reinvented every time on location.^{viii}

Such a description calls to mind concepts that we often associate with Situationism and Conceptualism, such as "revolutionary experiments" and "spontaneous constructions of a situation."^{ix} Interestingly, the Tupamaros never considered themselves to be artists nor did they consider their operations artworks, although artists were among their members.

Nevertheless, Camnitzer insists on framing their activities as “artistic events,” contending that the Tupamaros joined creativity with political action in such a way that their relationship was made “natural and mutually supportive.”^x

The S.I., unlike the Tupamaros, focused much of their creative energy on the production and dissemination of theory. The nature of that theory is difficult to summarize as a coherent whole since the S.I. community consisted of a network of intellectuals from several European countries that engaged in a dynamic, and at times internally contentious, dialogue between 1958-1969. Nevertheless, Camnitzer describes the two groups as “catalysts for change” and a source of political enlightenment.^{xi} However, unlike the Tupamaros, the S.I. simply described ways in which to divert creativity from cultural institutions into everyday realities with the intent to awaken political consciousness and provoke revolution. Unfortunately, Camnitzer does not support his comparison with specific examples of their similarities. I would contend that the relationship between the two groups is superficial and mainly strategic. However, it is worth exploring their affinities, partly because these can help clarify the reason for their interest within the contemporary art world.

As I mentioned above, both movements unhinge artistic practice from their traditional location within cultural institutions, and convert their function from representing life to regenerating it. Surely this operation was integral to the S.I. project, as they encouraged the orchestration of *dérives* and other “situations.” By licensing aesthetic experience to public invention and urban space, the cultural enterprise no longer depended on the context of the artist or museum. Aside from the potential radical effects

this has on cultural institutions, the S.I. argued that this break allows art to engage politics and ultimately engender revolution.

The Tupamaros did not seem to engage questions of artistic practice nor did they imagine their actions effecting art and its cultural systems. Thus, their role in the development of art and the avant-garde seems largely incidental. The Tupamaros attempt to infuse their activism with creativity certainly imagines artistic activity outside of its traditional structures and into everyday life. Additionally, this gesture shifts art's purpose away from mere representation to a radical transformation of political and social life. But, the guerilla group were never consciously invested in such a shift.

Camnitzer is the first critic to try to link the Tupamaros to the history of Conceptual art in Latin America. The Situationists, on the other hand, were quickly adopted into art history. As Gerard Raunig explains, the S.I.'s entry into the discipline stems from their initial artistic orientation, even though they later abandoned that position for a more politicized practice.^{xii} In fact, most art history focuses primarily on Situationist's early concepts such as the *dérive*, *psychogeography* and *détournement*. Tom McDonough contends that these practices were influenced by surrealism, reflecting an artistic avant-garde legacy which expanded notions of "chance, irrationality and revolutionary experiment."^{xiii} As such the Situationists had a loose connection to early artistic avant-garde movements such as Dadaism. Raunig also introduces an interesting point regarding the Situationists construction of the "art and politics" relationship.

Debord's increasingly vehement anti-art propaganda and the friction between art and revolution are constants in a long passage, a transition, a successive development from the art machine to the revolutionary machines. Experiences, strategies and competences that emerge in the 1950s in the art field, in confrontation and friction with art traditions...underwent a transition along this

passage. In the 1960s the S.I. increasingly left its original field and began cultivating the field of political theory and revolutionary action.^{xiv}

He attributes this transition to the Situationists own inability to overcome what he calls the “hierarchical fixation of the relationship between art and revolution.”^{xv}

It is this later shift that art historians tend to overlook because they continue to focus on the merging of art and politics in Situationism, particularly through the movement’s attempt to rethink art and its institutions.

In the endless (re)contextualizations of the Situationists within the discourse of art history, we find Camnitzer’s own agenda which is that their end point is not U.S. or European Conceptualist art, but rather Latin American Conceptualism. In other words, the Situationists’ configuration of art and politics is better suited for the Latin American context because their notion of avant-garde practice was more fully evident via politics. In some sense, Camnitzer wants to argue that Latin American conceptualism represents the materialization of art *and* revolution.

Camnitzer’s prime example of this linkage, along with most Latin Americanists, is Argentina’s Tucuman Arde. The event, which Camnitzer claims “pushed the artistic project to the borderline of the political project,” can be understood as the culmination of art’s radical push towards politics.^{xvi}

Camnitzer and scholars such as Andrea Giunta classify the events of Tucuman Arde as a type of Conceptual art that found expression in political action in representing the simultaneous dissolution of traditional art practice and re-emergence of political art.

Scholar Ana Longoni, in agreement with Giunta and Camnitzer, similarly frames Tucumán Arde as the moment at which art and politics really intersect. In their work, Longoni observes the role of the artist and activist virtually “canceled each other out,

leading many members of Tucumán Arde to abandon art altogether for other forms of cultural practice.”^{xvii} She elaborates on this claim in the article, “‘Vanguard’ and ‘revolution’: Key concepts in Argentine art during the 60s and 70s.” In this text she maps out the ways in which Argentina’s artists related their work to “the utopian imaginary of a new society, and the concrete political programs that invested in a radical transformation of the conditions of existence.”^{xviii} As Longoni elaborates, the artists played an “imminent and inevitable” role in the revolution. Artists fashioned a place for themselves within the growing political movement in Argentina, which oscillate between artistic and revolutionary action. Some examples that demonstrate this flux come from the *Itinerary of 1968* – a sequence of actions and events that Longoni believes links the avant-garde and revolution.”^{xix} It is worth noting these events preceded Tucumán Arde, but scholars agree these activities culminated in Tucumán. Of the events were:

Interrupting an inauguration with a political speech in order to stone and scratch the image of the assassinated former president of the U.S. John Kennedy; starting a riot in order to sabotage the distribution of awards in the National Museum of Fine Arts, with flyers, screams and stun grenades; kidnapping the director of the Center for Visual Arts of the Di Tella, Jorge Romero Brest during a conference in Rosario, an action which they defined as “a simulacra of an attack,” complete with the lights being cut off and a live reading of a proclamation; a collective reaction to the censorship of an artwork by destroying the artworks themselves and throwing the trash in the street – this episode ended with the imprisonment of a dozen artists; a clandestine night action to fill the most important fountains in the center of Buenos Aires with red paint.^{xx}

Some of these events evoke parallels with Tupamaros and it is possibly these kinds of actions that led Camnitzer to situate the guerilla group on a similar artistic axis.

In effect, Tucuman Arde and the events described above are political acts in the guise of artworks.

For Longoni, Argentinean art in the 60s defined “art for revolution,” and was perhaps the most successful at blending art and action. This is particularly relevant in light of Longoni’s conclusion which is that art and revolution eventually loses ground with the increasing militancy of many artists.

Implications for a Latin American Art History

Camnitzer’s methodology makes an interesting case study for both art history and its Latin American subfield. The use of *salpicar and compota* echoes another popular methodology in Latin American art historical discourse which is the “model of the constellation.” This construct, as it is used in the exhibition *Inverted Utopias*, “randomly connects luminous points that have no intrinsic relationship to one another, yet whose primary function lies in their potential to orient travelers in the exploration of vast territories.”^{xxi} Curator Mari Carmen Ramirez contends this model allows for a diachronic, yet non-chronological reading in order to “tell another story of Modernism.” In other words, this method generates a historical narrative that ruptures the Western modernist project of linearity, continuity and progress. Their enterprise undermines totalizing narratives in an effort to reorient us towards a more complicated and expanded understanding of the past. Camnitzer reiterates the desire to take a diachronic approach by which he follows the developments of Conceptualism in Latin America, but does not follow a linear trajectory or engage questions of causality. Rather, with *salpicar* Camnitzer claims to be writing with the intention of identifying shared trajectories across center and periphery, while *compota* takes these elements and interprets them through a contemporary understanding. Although Camnitzer does not fully adopt Ramirez’s

methodology because the constellation potentially yields “excessive disconnection,” his approach is analogous as they both cast a wide net across time periods, countries and movements in opposition to older art historical structures which seemingly inhibit the recuperation of marginal histories.

We can understand this as part of larger shift away from conventional historical methods in the discipline of history and art history. For scholars such as the New Historicists, Postmodernists to Post-structuralists, history operates as a complex network of discourses that do not necessarily illuminate the past, but cast light on the present and future. In the example of scholars Jeffrey Cox and Larry Reynolds, New Historicism “rejects the idea of history as a directly accessible, unitary past, and substitutes for it the conception of “histories”, an ongoing series of human constructions, each representing the past at particular present moments for particular present purposes.”^{xxii} Thus, the making of history cannot be unhinged from the ideology instrumental in the writing of a particular narrative.

Scholar Gina Hens-Piazza notes that New Historicists treat “texts, artifacts, shards, non-literary pieces – all the remains that historians consider as the data from which to apprehend the past” as representations or remakings of the past.”^{xxiii} In other words, the historian takes account of how these objects operate within an ideological system.

This supports my assertion that Camnitzer’s experience and past, inside and outside of Latin America, may have facilitated his triangular discourse across continents. First, by way of Camnitzer’s own formation as an artist and scholar that is stretched across countries. His own site of engagement is transnational since he was born in

Germany, grew up in Uruguay, lives in upstate New York, and critically engages contemporary Latin American aesthetic practices. Second, with Camnitzer's scrap of paper from 1970, which I recognize as a textual trace that allows him to apprehend his past. This note serves as an artifact that indexes Camnitzer's thinking in 1970, but which also reconstructs the past as linked across French Situationism, the Tupamaros and Conceptualism.

Furthermore, New Historicists understand their own work as part of another remaking that is often in opposition to older historical claims. I turn again to Hens-Piazza who contends New Historicists are generally "suspicious about any claims to the truth about the past, they strive instead to offer a critique of the reigning wisdom about how the past was produced."^{xxiv} In Camnitzer's present investigation of Latin American Conceptualism we detect a similar trend in which he refutes a single seamless history that is incompatible with the formation of Conceptualism in Latin America.

Hans Belting's book *Art History After Modernism* traces a similar shift in historical construction within the discipline of art history. According to Belting, arts historians have abandoned conventional historical methods for an approach that fuses fact, information and interpretation for the purpose of finding meaning in the present.^{xxv} While Camnitzer does not see himself as an art historian, and thus assuming to not write an art history, this text does bear these characteristics. But, more importantly *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* shapes the understanding of Latin American Conceptualist art and generates interesting questions about the construction of that history.

Thus, my argument here is that Camnitzer's work is a complex network of overlapping principles and practices that resonate with the new historicist path towards reconfiguring history and its operation, to the post-structuralist and postmodern inclinations to recognize history as a discursive field. I want to recognize that Conceptualism in Latin American Art is rooted in art history's current theoretical trends and methodological debates. His text which relies on tenuous affiliations satisfy a general interest in global dialogues in art history, but also fulfils the purpose of producing a type of history of, and about resistance.

I find, however, that Camnitzer's work falls victim to a now hegemonic pattern that depends upon a Western theoretical paradigm to participate in art historical discourse. Yet, he proceeds with caution by inserting an example of the Tupamaros. Their influence on Latin American Conceptualism is as fragile of a construct as their relationship to the Situationists, but this requires further research. It would seem, however, that Camnitzer does not need to rely on the Tupamaros, but rather is able to make a conceptual leap from the S.I. to the first Latin American conceptual artworks, i.e. Tucuman Arde. Unfortunately, that is historical irresponsible and acts against his objective to frame Latin American art within its own cultural, and political, history.

On the other hand, these imaginary traces conform to a particular ideology and not a substantiated organization of information. Does this in effect challenge the privileging of Western modernism? How does such a methodology inverse the norms of conventional art history, particularly when we are not bound to any conclusion? In what ways can we break from the art historical canon that writes local histories through a theoretical prism that derives from the West? Indeed, Luis Camnitzer is an example of

this. It is likely he came in contact with Situationism, while in New York, and with his knowledge of Uruguay's political context he was able to understand one through the other, regardless of contextual consistency.

While Camnitzer's text certainly reveals the affinities that cut across the French Situationists, the Tupamaros and early Conceptual work in Latin American, we never reach the complexities of Latin American Conceptualism's actual origination? If we continue to fashion our historical narratives like this, what are the implications for understanding Latin American art history? I do not assume art historical ventures must reach a level of absolute or genuine knowledge, but I wonder how to redraw strategic relationships and links without having to abandon historical traces and ties?

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- ⁱⁱ Ramirez, Mari Carmen. *Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960-1980*. Global Conceptualism: Points of Origins, 1950s-1980s. New York: Queens Museum of Art/Distributed Art Publishers, 1999. 53.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, 60.
- ^{iv} Camnitzer, Luis. Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation. Texas: University of Texas, 2007. 2.
- ^v Ibid, 3.
- ^{vi} Ibid, 9.
- ^{vii} Wark, McKenzie. 50 years of recuperation of the Situationist International. New Jersey: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008.
- ^{viii} Ibid, 48.
- ^{ix} Raunig, Gerald. Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007. 171-172.
- ^x Camnitzer, 12.
- ^{xi} Ibid, 252.
- ^{xii} Raunig, 184-185.
- ^{xiii} McDonough, Tom. Ideology and the Situationist Utopia. Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents. Tom Mc Donough, Ed. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002.11.
- ^{xiv} Ibid, 184.
- ^{xv} Ibid, 185.
- ^{xvi} Camnitzer, 61.
- ^{xvii} Ramirez, 67.
- ^{xviii} Longoni, Ana. "Vanguard" and "revolution", key concepts in Argentine art during the 60s and 70s. Documenta Magazine. (September 28 2007) June 07 2009.
<<http://magazines.documenta.de/frontend/article.php?IdLanguage=1&NrArticle=669>>
- ^{xix} Ibid.
- ^{xx} Ibid.
- ^{xxi} Ramirez, Mari Carmen. *The Displacement of Utopias. Versions and Inversions: Perspectives on Avant-Garde Art in Latin America*. New Haven: Yale Press, 2006. 127.
- ^{xxii} Cox, Jeffrey N. and Larry J. Reynolds, *New Historical Literary Study*. Ed. Cox and Reynolds (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). 4
- ^{xxiii} Hens-Piazza, Gina. The New Historicism. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002. 28
- ^{xxiv} Ibid, 33.
- ^{xxv} Belting, Art History after Modernism. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. 24.

**Abstract - A imaginação coletiva do espaço social
[The collective imagination of the social space].**

This paper presents some reflections about actions taken by some art collectives in Brazil, such as Poro (Belo Horizonte), Grupo de Interferência Ambiental (Salvador), Entorno (Brasília), Frente 3 de Fevereiro (São Paulo), and Contrafilé (São Paulo), since the 2000's. From small urban interventions to the occupation of streets through transitional shelters or political metaphors, the artistic practices of Brazilian collectives employs a variety of tactics and strategies that emphasizes the creation of a new social space and claims the political power and creativity of the imagination in the city. The text also presents examples of how collaborations between artists and social movements produces important questions about how the processes of dialogue and interaction between different groups (collectives, movements or specific communities) can raises a series of negotiations and conflicts.

A imaginação coletiva do espaço social

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O breve texto que apresento a seguir¹, derivado de uma parte de minha dissertação de mestrado, *Insurgências Poéticas: Arte Ativista e Ação Coletiva (1990-2000)*², é uma proposta aberta e ainda em processo que se inicia com uma pergunta feita pelo antropólogo anarquista David Graeber, e que me parece ser um problema levantado pela maioria das teorias revolucionárias que, de alguma maneira, atravessam transversalmente os campos da arte e do ativismo: “*precisamente, qual é o papel da criatividade, coletiva ou individual, da imaginação, dentro da mudança social radical?*”³

Seria interessante e desafiador levar esta pergunta para o território de algumas ações recentes dos coletivos de arte ativista no Brasil⁴, reconhecendo as particularidades de cada grupo no sentido de obter um conjunto diverso sobre o significado de suas práticas para a imaginação de um novo espaço social. O que se entende por imaginação aqui é o poder criativo renovado por experimentações coletivas no espaço urbano e no seu contato com outras disciplinas e colaborações com movimentos sociais ou comunidades específicas. Através da escuta atenta de questões e demandas distintas, a arte torna-se um elemento importante no processo de produção de novas realidades sociais e materiais.

Com base nas considerações de Henri Lefebvre, podemos dizer que o conceito de *espaço social* é uma “categoria social” que permite a ocorrência de

novas ações; “é tanto um campo de ação (oferecendo sua extensão para a organização de projetos e de intenções práticas), como uma base de ação (um conjunto de lugares por onde energias se originam e se direcionam).”⁵ Produzir novos espaços sociais e prefigurar novas linguagens para o protesto são algumas preocupações que atravessam constantemente a essência de muitos coletivos brasileiros surgidos em meados dos anos de 1990. Embora tais grupos não apresentem um posicionamento anti-institucional, muitos de seus projetos encontram-se na tentativa de movimentar-se no ideal de produção de uma contra-esfera pública na cidade, ao invés de simplesmente legitimá-los dentro de um sistema de galerias-curadores-críticos-museus que rotula ou não suas práticas como “Arte”.

Todo o poder à cidade

É preciso observar que a cidade, de acordo com Martha Rosler, é muito mais que um conglomerado de relacionamentos, de construções ou uma localidade geopolítica, mas um conjunto de processos históricos em exposição. “Uma cidade incorpora e interpreta uma história. Na representação da cidade, na produção de contra-representações, as especificidades de uma localidade e de suas histórias tornam-se críticas.”⁶ Escrever uma história sobre a “tradição imaginativa” de coletivos de arte, de heranças táticas e de ativismo político nos espaços das cidades brasileiras implicaria em considerar uma série de contextos e épocas que se articulam em convergências e sobreposições heterogêneas, privilegiando situações sociais e atos poéticos que se alinham e

se fundem temporariamente nas lutas e nos fragmentos da vida cotidiana. Precedentes históricos de um coletivismo estão, por exemplo, no núcleo das festividades populares (como carnaval e futebol) e rituais religiosos, expressões nacionais que animaram o experimentalismo das proposições artísticas de caráter participativo nos anos de 1960 e na importância de uma “arte coletiva total.”⁷ Manifestações como os mutirões comunitários e as ocupações de prédios no centro das cidades pelos movimentos de moradia, os saraus cooperativos na periferia e as gangues anônimas de pichadores, somam-se aos traços de um coletivismo de resistência que responde ou transgride os momentos de adversidade cultural e as desigualdades sócio-econômicas.

Na esfera propriamente dita da arte e de sua relação com o urbano, podemos citar como alguns exemplos as *Experiências* de Flávio de Carvalho sobre a “psicologia das multidões” e o fluxo transitório nas cidades, realizadas em 1931 e 1956 em São Paulo, e a própria desmaterialização da prática artística⁸, entre os anos de 1960 e 1980, para provocar mudanças sociais e questionamentos políticos durante o período do regime militar no País (1964-1985). As estratégias de “conceitualismo insurgente” combinando performance, subversão da mídia e o uso de materiais precários, como as “trouxas ensanguentadas” (*Situação T/T1*, 1970) de Artur Barrio, depositadas anonimamente no esgoto da cidade de Belo Horizonte, documentadas pela imprensa e por fotografias que tornaram visíveis um fato social que acontecia às margens da sociedade⁹; e as *Inserções em circuitos ideológicos* (1970-1975), de Cildo Meireles, criaram um sistema descentralizado e tático de troca e compartilhamento de opiniões críticas e posicionamentos sobre a repressão

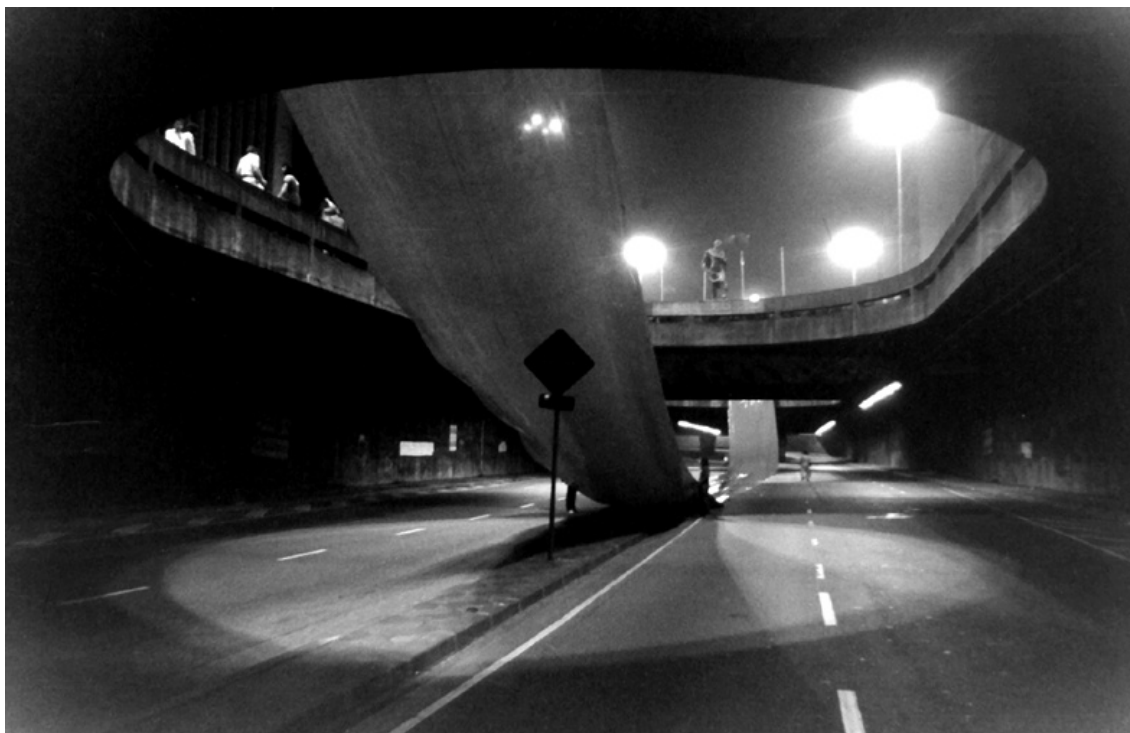
da ditadura militar, assim como a sugestão de ações rápidas e coletivas, tensas e imprevisíveis, optando muitas vezes pelo anonimato para evitar a mediação institucional e pela busca de um novo tipo de público.

Os *happenings* do Grupo Rex em São Paulo (1966-1967), manifestando uma atitude de confronto com sistema de arte¹⁰, o hibridismo entre anti-arte e operações de “guerrilha artística”, tal como denomina o crítico Frederico Moraes as proposições participativas de Lygia Clark e Hélio Oiticica¹¹, a ocupação de *outdoors* publicitários com frases e imagens por Nelson Leirner (1968), por Claudio Tozzi (1972) e pelas edições da exposição coletiva *ArtDoor* (Recife e Porto Alegre, 1981 e 1982), realizadas por Paulo Bruscky, tornaram-se modos de reivindicação da cidade como espaço para a arte.

Já em fins da década de setenta e início dos anos oitenta, diferentes ações coletivas e poéticas aparecem com as inscrições em verde-amarelo do Profeta Gentileza nas pilastras do Viaduto do Caju (Rio de Janeiro), as ações do grupo Sensibilizar em Curitiba e os coletivos de arte em São Paulo, como 3Nós3, Viajou Sem Passaporte, GEXTU, D’Magrela, Manga Rosa, e TupiNãoDá, coincidindo em alguns momentos com o teatro militante de grupos formados por trabalhadores de base durante a mobilização sindical no ABC paulista, como Ferramenta e Forja, e a proliferação das subculturas urbanas com o início do movimento *Punk* e *Hip Hop* no Brasil.

Muitos outros eventos autônomos, públicos ou institucionais sobre coletivos de arte e novas formas de organização apareceram a partir dos anos noventa no País¹², sem contar também os protestos ativistas, como os *Dias de Ação Global* em 2000 e 2001, reunindo os voluntários dos centros de mídia independente, estudantes, anarquistas, feministas, *punks*, socialistas libertários

e ecologistas radicais, em manifestações contra a ALCA, G8, FMI e Banco Mundial, simultâneas em diversas cidades do mundo.



3Nós3. *Intervenção VI*, 1980. Centenas de metros de plástico colocados em uma grande Avenida de São Paulo, sem a autorização da polícia, no momento de abertura política em um espaço urbano que “*deixa a compressão da ditadura e começa a ter uma ‘distensão’.*” O grupo chamava de “*interversões*” as ações que realizava em São Paulo, como a “*inversão da percepção da paisagem, muito mais do que a idéia de simplesmente infiltrar-se nela.*” Foto: Cortesia de Mario Ramiro.

Um vocabulário estético de contra-representações

Algumas das iniciativas citadas anteriormente simplesmente desmontam a idéia restrita de que um “coletivo” nasce apenas na condição de um agrupamento formal ou um núcleo de artistas. As relações entre práticas artísticas e ativismo contemporâneo reinventam a ação coletiva e reivindicam não só a *ocupação*, mas também a *criação* de um espaço público. Estratégias de participação e da produção de um público, de acordo com Michael Warner, como “*o espaço social criado pela circulação reflexiva do discurso*”¹³, articulam

um duplo movimento entre as nossas definições de coletivismo¹⁴ e imaginação, sendo esta uma força produtiva e inseparável de suas políticas de percepção.

Influências das produções artísticas das décadas de sessenta, setenta e oitenta aparecem eventualmente nas propostas atuais dos coletivos brasileiros, sem a necessidade de retomá-las como guias estritos ou herança a ser forçosamente reivindicada. No entanto, parece correto afirmar que os coletivos identificam nas práticas de “intervenção urbana” suas oportunidades de imaginarem e produzirem os efeitos de novas realidades. Em resumo, o diagrama produzido pelo coletivo Contrafilé resume esquematicamente o processo intervencionista para a transformação de um determinado contexto:

>>> situação A >>> observar >>> identificar elemento com potencial de ruptura >>> intervir evidenciando o elemento disparador >>> ruptura da situação >>> situação B >>>.

O estilo das intervenções urbanas em estabelecer outras perspectivas e caminhos para modificar os fluxos do cotidiano contribui com a nossa compreensão da idéia de um espaço social como um “espaço lógico-epistemológico”, *“o espaço da prática social, ocupado pelo fenômeno sensorial, incluindo produtos da imaginação, como projetos e projeções, símbolos e utopias.”*¹⁵ Mas, quais seriam os resultados sociais e políticos destes “produtos da imaginação”? Que potencialidades estas práticas intervencionistas são capazes de produzir por meio de inflexões ou rupturas concretas na cidade?

Pode-se dizer que as dimensões e os efeitos criativos dessas intervenções artísticas são tão variados quanto seus objetivos. Coletivos como o grupo Poro (formado em 2002 em Belo Horizonte)¹⁶ optam como estratégia a

realização de pequenas interferências pela cidade, como pintar folhas secas com *spray* dourado e devolvê-las à copa de uma árvore (*Folhas de Ouro*, 2002), ocupar um jardim abandonado com flores de papel celofane vermelho (*Jardim*, 2004), incorporar o espírito situacionista de colar adesivos de imagens de interruptores de luz nos postes (*Espaços Virtuais*, 2004)¹⁷ ou espalhar desenhos de azulejos de papel em muros de casas e lotes abandonados. Em uma cidade saturada por imagens, imaginar um espaço social a partir das ações do Poro torna-se um exercício sublime sobre a natureza comum e rotineira do cotidiano, que demanda “*momentos passageiros de lucidez engajada com o mundo real.*”¹⁸



Poro. *Azulejos de Papel*. Belo Horizonte, 2009. Foto: Marcelo Terça-Nada!

Já o Grupo de Interferência Ambiental (GIA, formado em 2002 em Salvador)¹⁹ costuma montar pelas cidades (e agora dentro de exposições

internacionais) um espaço improvisado chamado *Caramujo*: uma estrutura frágil, precária e efêmera, construída com lona amarela para abrigar suas criações junto ao público.²⁰ Inspirado pelas proposições de Oiticica sobre a construção de um ambiente aberto e comunitário, *Caramujo* transforma-se em uma base onde o grupo pode propor vivências fazendo uma roda de samba com a participação das pessoas, criar um espaço para as atividades com crianças, preparar interferências ou distribuir panfletos que ensinam como fazer suas intervenções. Alguns materiais impressos das intervenções dos coletivos Poro e GIA são distribuídos a outras pessoas que as recriam posteriormente em situações diversas, afirmando neste compartilhamento a informalidade estética destas “obras de arte faça-você-mesmo” e o caráter de seu domínio público.²¹



Grupo de Interferência Ambiental. *Caramujo*. Recife, 2005. Foto: GIA.

Se o Poro aposta em pequenas ações poéticas e o GIA lança estratégias vernaculares como modo de afirmar o potencial de soluções

improvisadas de ocupação fluída dos espaços, outros grupos buscam ressignificar a cidade por meio de metáforas políticas. Nas eleições presidenciais de 2002, o coletivo Entorno (formado em Brasília em 2002) inventou um candidato fictício cuja imagem deste mito era uma junção dos rostos dos integrantes do grupo. O “Candidato do Entorno” saía pelas ruas da Capital Federal inaugurando simbolicamente lugares abandonados que fizeram parte da construção de Brasília, mas que perderam sua função inicial, como a concha acústica, o planetário e um teatro de arena (hoje soterrado), em uma cidade que, aos poucos, parece esquecer o seu próprio passado.



Inauguração da concha acústica pelo “Candidato do Entorno”. Brasília, 2002. Nos espaços inaugurados, o coletivo plantava uma árvore e tirava fotos registrando a ação. Foto: cortesia de Clarissa Borges.

Do centro do poder para o caos de São Paulo, as intervenções coletivas convergem de maneira mais clara e evidente com o ativismo político e com a esfera dos movimentos, onde as próprias relações colaborativas da arte com

outras comunidades já incluem uma série de negociações.²² Há, contudo, um interesse frequente de alguns artistas em produzir formas de “dissenso criativo” que simbolizem experiências e denúncias de um espaço social marcado pelo conflito. O coletivo transdisciplinar Frente 3 de Fevereiro²³ vem desde 2004 realizando ações que questionam o ideal brasileiro de “democracia racial” e de um país “sem racismo”. Seu projeto mais ambicioso, *Futebol* (2005), usou a estratégia de intervenções em estádios tendo como suporte a força da multidão. Durante a celebração das partidas de futebol, torcidas organizadas abriam bandeiras com as frases “BRASIL NEGRO SALVE”, “ONDE ESTÃO OS NEGROS?” e “ZUMBI SOMOS NÓS”, capturadas por alguns segundos pelo espetáculo das transmissões televisivas e disseminadas em cadeia nacional.²⁴ Imagem e ação se articulam como uma atividade que cria um mundo de leituras possíveis sobre um Brasil negro a ser salvo, de quem se reconhece como negro e uma identidade que se coloca como agente da história, com a narração objetiva de uma proposta política a ser defendida.

Em um espaço social que se constitui pela projeção midiática de cenários, a própria comunicação é uma ação política, ação, escreve Paolo Virno, que intervém nas relações sociais, tem a ver com o possível e o imprevisto para modificar o contexto. “A ação política é pública, entregue à exterioridade, à contingência, ao rumor de ‘muitos’.”²⁵ O coletivo aposta na atemporalidade do programa político de suas bandeiras, na medida em que as recontextualiza em performances públicas e dá a elas um sentido próximo ao de um “anti-monumento”. A presença física, estética e conceitual deste anti-monumento em um espaço e tempo específicos pode ter o seu significado replicado e perpetuado como resistência e mudança. Recentemente a Frente 3

de Fevereiro estendeu no estacionamento de um supermercado a bandeira “ONDE ESTÃO OS NEGROS?”, no mesmo lugar onde um homem negro havia sido brutalmente espancado pelos seguranças, depois de ser tomado por “suspeito” do roubo de seu próprio carro.



Frente 3 de Fevereiro. *Carrefour Racista*. Osasco, 2009.

Performances-protesto trabalham com a transmissão da memória e a produção de imagens culturais. A performance se infiltra no corpo social de maneira inesperada, tal como o trauma.²⁶ A compreensão e a reconfiguração do trauma por uma performance ganha uma enorme complexidade quando um grupo procura simbolizar a experiência de movimentos sociais e o discurso sobre grupos marginalizados. Idéias, práticas e informações são convertidas em imagens expressas em signos e na escala do corpo, procurando alcançar uma outra interpretação da visualidade das lutas sociais. Nessa perspectiva de produção de outras linguagens para o protesto a partir da elaboração dos conflitos, o coletivo Contrafilé (formado em São Paulo em 2000) trabalhou em

2005 e 2006 no projeto *A Rebelião das Crianças*, junto com o movimento de mães de internos da FEBEM (atualmente Fundação CASA)²⁷, a Associação de Mães e Amigos da Criança Adolescente em Risco (AMAR).

O coletivo questionou a criminalização e a manutenção de jovens em estados de confinamento e seu extermínio social, buscando entender o significado de uma rebelião em uma instituição como a FEBEM e discutindo criticamente sobre como a grande mídia constrói a imagem dessa juventude como criminosa e marginal. O Contrafilé produziu suas “Assembléias Públicas de Olhares”²⁸ e participou de conversas com a associação, ajudando-a a realizar um protesto não-convencional em frente à Secretaria de Justiça da cidade. Ao invés de um ato tradicional, coletivo e associação criaram juntos na manifestação de outubro de 2006 uma festa infantil, onde apresentaram imagens, performances e cartazes com dados concretos sobre tortura e morte de jovens na FEBEM e o desvio de dinheiro na instituição. Crianças, moradores de rua e organizadores “comemoraram” com uma mesa de refrigerantes, doces, café e bolo a perda da infância anulada pelo recolhimento, buscando conscientizar o público sobre a violência física, social e psicológica sofrida por esses adolescentes em um sistema coercivo.



Contrafilé. *A Rebelião das Crianças*. Ato contra a tortura organizado anualmente pela AMAR, vivido como uma festa infantil, em parceria com o coletivo. São Paulo, 2006. Foto: cortesia do grupo.

Desenlaces imaginários de uma investigação

A tarefa de delinear uma conclusão final sobre as táticas e estratégias empregadas pelos coletivos apresentados neste texto soa um tanto difícil. Interferências silenciosas, a estética do efêmero e do precário como um estado de encontro, a ativação dos espaços da memória por mitos coletivos, intervenções na escala da mídia e da multidão, a produção simbólica com o movimento social e a relação da arte com outras esferas colaborativas reconhecem a sua própria diversidade e possibilitam a colocação de muitas questões.

Em primeiro lugar, podemos considerar a afirmação de que arte ativista não significa apenas “arte política”, mas um compromisso de engajamento direto com as forças de uma produção não-mediada pelos mecanismos oficiais de representação (mídia, partidos políticos etc). O que parece ser um vetor comum dentro das intervenções dos coletivos Poro, GIA, Entorno, Frente 3 de Fevereiro e Contrafilé é ação processual em diferentes planos e camadas não-alienadas de experiências artísticas na cidade. Algumas reflexões feitas pela teórica Marina Vishmidt sobre práticas intervencionistas nos mostram que o que pode ser devidamente potencializado na arte como produção social é sua experiência compartilhada, não-dependente de alianças sectárias com as políticas de representação.²⁹ Para Vishmidt, um indicador político dessas ações está no momento em que a experiência da arte na vida cotidiana torna-se a sua própria crítica radical e cria novos antagonismos.

A ligação entre formas simbólicas e diretas de intervenção devem ser repensadas e reorganizadas de uma maneira mais ampla. Um ponto importante a ser considerado nesses projetos é saber como tais intervenções respondem às mudanças na organização da cidade e dos movimentos sociais, mas também às suas próprias formas de produção. A posição do coletivo como um especialista em gerenciar “produtos artísticos” levanta alguns questionamentos, principalmente na circulação cada vez mais frequente de seus trabalhos em grandes exposições ou bienais. O coletivismo artístico pode contribuir com a imaginação de outras relações sociais ou desmistificar a imagem do artista como “gênio criador individual”. Mas, para Vishmidt, os coletivos não conseguem enfraquecer a subjetividade privilegiada do artista,

fechada no sistema de arte como esfera especializada da divisão capitalista de trabalho.³⁰

Encontros colaborativos entre coletivos de arte e movimentos sociais geram um compartilhamento útil de táticas e de apropriações de linguagens que denunciam, ao seu modo, as contradições do sistema, afirmando a consolidação de um “poder vindo de baixo”. Aliás, até que ponto as táticas oferecidas pelos coletivos a um movimento ou comunidade dão visibilidade para um grupo “desfavorecido” ou apenas aos próprios artistas? Isso deveria ser um tema de reflexão e inquietação para os artistas-ativistas. Parece-me que o próprio trabalho coletivo em colaboração com as lutas e demandas sociais específicas precisa estar atento a um processo lento, mas cuidadoso, de formação de coalizões que evitem transformar o artista em “provedor de serviços”; alguém que projeta símbolos e intervenções em um determinado movimento para apenas legitimar suas criações. Sobre isso, Grant H. Kester coloca que projetos artísticos em colaboração com “comunidades politicamente coerentes” tendem a buscar um processo mais recíproco de diálogo e de educação mútua, com o artista aprendendo com esta comunidade/movimento, desafiando e transformando seus próprios dilemas e preconceitos.³¹ Mais do que isso, a imaginação coletiva do espaço social é um projeto, uma prática política prefigurativa de novas formas sociais, organizacionais e éticas, onde o *existir*, como disse Lygia Clark, “*consiste numa mudança radical do mundo em vez de ser somente uma interpretação do mesmo.*”³²

NOTAS

¹ O leitor deverá considerar as notas de rodapé mais detalhadas deste texto como parte fundamental e integrante de sua articulação reflexiva.

² Dissertação defendida em setembro de 2008 pelo Departamento de História da Universidade de São Paulo. O arquivo eletrônico do texto encontra-se disponível em português no endereço: <<http://www.teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8138/tde-03122008-163436/>>. Neste projeto, pesquisei as relações entre coletivos de arte e ativismo contemporâneo através de grupos residentes nos Estados Unidos, Canadá, França, Espanha, Austrália e Brasil. Tais artistas-ativistas têm produzido ações como protestos contra a globalização capitalista, intervenções urbanas, performances, instalações, projetos colaborativos com comunidades, mídia táctica e *culture jamming*.

³ GRAEBER, David. *Possibilities: Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion, and Desire*. Oakland: AK Press, 2007. p. 114.

⁴ Caracterizar diretamente os coletivos brasileiros como “ativistas” pode evitar a importância de certas nuances e posicionamentos diferenciados de seus projetos, às vezes mais poéticos, outros mais políticos.

⁵ LEFEBVRE, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001. p. 191.

⁶ ROSLER, Martha. “Fragments of a metropolitan viewpoint”, in WALLIS, Brian (ed.). *If You Lived Here. The City in Art, Theory and Social Activism. A project by Martha Rosler*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1991. p. 32.

⁷ Período em que se privilegia a ação do corpo onde “o social, o político e o subjetivo se configuram em seus múltiplos sentidos e direções.” Ver FREIRE, Cristina. *Arte Conceitual*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor, 2006. p.50. A tendência à participação na arte brasileira, escreve Hélio Oiticica no ensaio “Esquema Geral da Nova Objetividade” (1967), encontra-se na atitude de jogar as produções individuais de seus realizadores em contato com o público das ruas ou a criação de obras coletivas junto a esse público. Sobre essas experiências, Oiticica as considera como “programas abertos à realização”. Ver OITICICA, Hélio. “Esquema Geral da Nova Objetividade”, in FERREIRA, Glória e COTRIM, Cecília (orgs.). *Escritos de Artistas. Anos 60/70*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor, 2006. pp.154-168.

⁸ Ver SLATER, Howard. “The Spoiled Ideals of Lost Situations. Some Notes on Political Conceptual Art”, junho de 2000. Disponível em: <<http://www.infopool.org.uk/hs.htm>>. Acesso em: 20 set. 2009.

⁹ Seriam as trouxas ensanguentadas consequências do crime do Esquadrão da Morte ou tortura política pela ditadura militar?

¹⁰ Já em outras regiões do País, coletivos como o Etsedron (anagrama da palavra Nordeste), criado em Salvador em 1969, valorizaram uma multiplicidade de meios e linguagens (literatura, música, dança e cinema) em suas instalações, formulando os aspectos de uma identidade brasileira sertaneja menosprezada pelo circuito institucionalizado das artes e submisso aos modelos estrangeiros.

¹¹ “O artista, hoje, é uma espécie de guerrilheiro. A arte, uma forma em emboscada (...). Tudo pode transformar-se em arte, mesmo o mais banal evento cotidiano. Vítima constante da guerrilha artística, o espectador vê-se obrigado a ativar seus sentidos. Ver MORAIS, Frederico. “Contra a arte afluyente: o corpo é o motor da obra”, 1970, in BASBAUM, Ricardo (org.). *Arte Contemporânea Brasileira: texturas, dicções, ficções, estratégias*. Rio de Janeiro: Contra Capa, 2001. pp. 171.

¹² A quantidade de projetos, mostras e encontros realizados nos últimos anos sobre coletivos e intervenção urbana no País é extensa e de contribuição importante para a

circulação de ações, trabalhos e formação de redes. Podemos citar iniciativas como *Arte de Portas Abertas* (Rio de Janeiro, desde 1996), as edições do *Prêmio Interferências Urbanas* (Rio de Janeiro, desde 2000), *Perdidos no Espaço* (Porto Alegre, desde 2000), *Zona Franca* (Rio de Janeiro, 2001), *Açúcar Invertido* (Rio de Janeiro, 2002), *Semana de Artes Visuais do Recife* (desde 2002), *Mídia Tática Brasil* (São Paulo, 2003), *Manifestação Internacional de Performance* (Belo Horizonte, desde 2003), *Reverberações* (São Paulo, desde 2004), *Zona de Ação* (São Paulo, 2004), *Salão de m.a.i.o* (2004 e 2005), organizado em Salvador pelo Grupo de Interferência Ambiental, e as edições do projeto *Experiência Imersiva Ambiental* (São Paulo, desde 2004).

¹³ WARNER, Michael. *Publics and Counterpublics*. Nova York: Zone Books, 2002. p. 90.

¹⁴ Definição que coloca em evidência a importância de se fazer uma crítica mais contundente sobre as situações sociais e econômicas do capitalismo flexível, onde o coletivo torna-se condição ontológica do processo de produção “cognitiva” e “imaterial”.

¹⁵ LEFEBVRE, Henri, op. cit. p. 12.

¹⁶ <http://poro.redezero.org>

¹⁷ Atitude do grupo de colar adesivos de interruptores nos postes de luz faz uma analogia interessante com uma frase do manifesto escrito em 1955 pela Internacional Lettrista: “*Todas as lâmpadas das ruas deveriam ser equipadas com interruptores, para que as pessoas possam ajustar a luz como quiserem.*” Ver LETTRIST INTERNATIONAL. “Proposals for Rationally Improving the City of Paris”, 1955. Disponível em: <<http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/paris.htm>>. Acesso em: 20 set. 2009.

¹⁸ RAQS MEDIA COLLECTIVE. “A concise lexicon of/for the digital commons”, in BRADLEY, Will e ESCHE, Charles (eds.). *Art and Social Change. A Critical Reader*. Londres: Tate, 2007. p. 346.

¹⁹ <http://giabahia.blogspot.com>

²⁰ Será que a própria iniciativa do GIA, de apresentar dentro de uma exposição o projeto de uma instalação efêmera como *Caramujo*, já não recaí na tendência de um discurso contemporâneo da arte sobre celebrar a estetização da precariedade? Para uma análise mais aprofundada sobre a recuperação dessas táticas improvisadas pela passividade ou pelo protesto, ver DEZEUZE, Anna. “Thriving on adversity: the art of precariousness”, in *Mute*, volume 2, número 3. Londres, 2006. pp. 74-87.

²¹ Podemos definir como obras de arte faça-você-mesmo textos, imagens ou objetos que podem ser manipulados, instruções para eventos realizados individualmente e coletivamente, ou outras proposições de performances multiplicadas de forma livre. Ver DEZEUZE, Anna. *The “Do-it-yourself Artwork”: Spectator Participation and the “Dematerialisation” of the Art Object, New York and Rio de Janeiro, 1958-1967*, tese de doutorado. Londres: Courtauld Institute of Art, 2003.

²² Um dos exemplos mais relevantes dessa relação entre artistas, comunidades e movimentos sociais em São Paulo está na aproximação dos coletivos de arte, como BijaRi, Catadores de Histórias, Cia. Cachorra, Coletivo Dragão da Gravura, Elefante, Espaço Coringa, Esqueleto Coletivo, Experiência Imersiva Ambiental, Frente 3 de Fevereiro, Nova Pasta, Tranca Rua, Integração Sem Posse, entre outros, com a Ocupação Prestes Maia. Entre 2003 e 2007, estes grupos se aproximaram desta ocupação criada por um movimento de moradia em um prédio localizado no Centro de São Paulo, onde viveram cerca de 468 famílias. Em termos bem resumidos, estes coletivos realizaram encontros, exposições, intervenções e ações de apoio na ocupação sobre a sua história e contra a reintegração de posse do prédio, contribuindo para tentar modificar de alguma forma a imagem de um movimento que costuma ser visto como “marginal” ou “ilegal” pela grande mídia e a maioria das pessoas. Para uma reflexão crítica sobre esta história, ver o terceiro capítulo de minha dissertação de mestrado e o texto de Gavin

Adams, “Coletivos de arte e a Ocupação Prestes Maia em São Paulo”, dezembro de 2006. Disponível em: <<http://magazines.documenta.de/frontend/article.php?IdLanguage=9&NrArticle=245>>.

²³ <http://www.frente3defevereiro.com.br>

²⁴ Logo após o episódio de racismo ocorrido durante o jogo entre São Paulo e Quilmes (abril de 2005), quando o zagueiro argentino Leandro Desábato ofendeu o jogador Grafite em campo com xingamentos racistas, o coletivo começou o seu processo de pesquisa e produção das intervenções. Para o projeto, a Frente 3 de Fevereiro negociou com as torcidas organizadas a abertura das bandeiras de 20m x 15m durante os jogos nos estádios.

²⁵ VIRNO, Paolo. *Gramática da Multidão*, 2003. Disponível em: <http://br.geocities.com/polis_contemp/Virno_gramatica_multidao.pdf>. Acesso em: 20 set. 2009.

²⁶ Sobre este assunto, ver TAYLOR, Diane. “DNA of Performance: Political Hauntology”, in SOMMER, Doris (ed.). *Cultural Agency in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. pp. 52-81.

²⁷ Segundo o grupo, o que motivou o Contrafilé a olhar para este tema foi uma grande rebelião que aconteceu no início de 2005 na Fundação para o Bem Estar do Menor (FEBEM) – cárcere juvenil onde até então viviam cerca de seis mil crianças e adolescentes julgados como criminosos. “*Passamos a acompanhar diariamente as notícias sobre a rebelião, fazendo leituras críticas e coletivas de jornais. Até que começamos a substituir palavras para ver o que acontecia. Ao invés de ‘juventude encarcerada’, ‘internos’, ‘menores’, líamos: crianças.*” Ver CONTRAFILÉ. *A Rebelião das Crianças*. São Paulo: VAI/Prefeitura de São Paulo, 2007. p. 8.

²⁸ É como o coletivo chama os seus encontros com as pessoas para compartilhar histórias, idéias e simbolizar experiências.

²⁹ VISHMIDT, Marina. “Line Describing a Curb: Asymptotes About Valie Export, the New Urbanism and Contemporary Art”, in BRADLEY, Will e ESCHE, Charles (eds.). *Art and Social Change. A Critical Reader*. Londres: Tate, 2007. p. 454.

³⁰ Ibidem. p. 455.

³¹ KESTER, Grant H. *Conversation Pieces. Community and Communication in Modern Art*. Berkley: University of California Press, 2004. p. 151.

³² FIGUEIREDO, Luciano (org.). *Lygia Clark–Hélio Oiticica. Cartas, 1964-1974*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora UFRJ, 1998. p. 59.

CV – André Mesquita

André Mesquita is theorist and researcher who explores recent links between art, politics and activism. At the moment he's working in your doctoral research at the Social History department of the University of São Paulo, with a study of "dissident maps and diagrams" made by artists and activists about the contemporary capitalism. He is a member of "Red Conceptualismos del Sur" and has participated in some of the collaborative projects involving art collectives and social movements that have taken place in São Paulo.

Abstract

This paper investigates the transformations of the historical notions of urban art and analyses the different categories of public art to reveal and discuss the inherent contradiction of the term. It focuses on a case study of an collaborative project named Vacant Lots: Collective Action for Urban Experimental Occupation in which a group of artists and architects intended to transform privately owned lots into temporary public spaces in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais (2006) and in Fortaleza, Ceará (2008).

The paper divides the historical concepts of public art into four categories: monuments and the cult of memory, anti-monuments as artistic strategy, urban art as resistance and dialogue as artistic practice. Through these categories it creates a reflection about the relation between art and its environment. Based on the study of the project Vacant Lots, the paper poses a variety of questions about urban artistic practices today. It intends to reveal the inherent contradiction among the different historical concepts, show their persistence in contemporary urban artistic practices in Brazil and to investigate the impropriety of public art.

Sítios de resistência: a impropriedade da arte pública

Ines Linke

A dimensão pública da arte tornou-se um debate central nas últimas décadas em muitas partes do mundo. Teóricos e críticos começaram a abordar a arte urbana e práticas artísticas que enfatizam situações que operam dentro da esfera social e analisar as diferentes estratégias com as quais artistas se relacionam com um contexto sócio-cultural específico. Mas há pouco ou nenhum consenso sobre uma definição de arte pública. Hoje, o termo é utilizado para referir-se tanto aos ornamentos e enfeites arquitetônicos, monumentos históricos e memoriais oficiais, as esculturas modernistas nos espaços urbanos, eventos comunitários, feiras de arte na rua, *cow parades*, projetos como o *ArteCidade* em São Paulo, como também as práticas dos *stickers* e graffiti. O que parece estar em jogo nas discussões são os diferentes aspectos que o termo arte pública pode assumir quando se considera o tema, processo, resultado, desafio ou o papel do Estado, das instituições governamentais e das políticas culturais, a especificidade do local, a participação do público e a recepção. Afinal, trata-se de qualquer manifestação artística no espaço externo, de uma arte para todos, de uma promoção de fins ideológicos ou de uma outra coisa? Como falar de arte pública hoje?

Usando como exemplo o contexto do projeto *Lotes Vagos* serão tratados aqui diferentes noções de arte pública. O texto realiza um diálogo entre parâmetros pertencentes a diferentes períodos históricos e o projeto de arte urbana realizado em Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais/ Brasil. Esse diálogo estabelecerá uma relação entre as categorias de monumento, antimonumento, sítio de resistência e prática relacional.

Historicamente a arte pública sugere monumentos ou construções majestosas destinadas a transmitir a memória de um fato ou de uma pessoa notável. Esses monumentos, formas sólidas feitas de materiais duráveis, facilmente cuidadas e instaladas em espaços urbanos participaram num culto da memória e da permanência, na invenção de uma consciência coletiva e na construção do chamado espaço público. Monumentos eram relacionados ao discurso ideológico ou institucional e erguidos dentro dos critérios normativos vigentes da qualidade artística. Construídos, preservados e valorizados como

fatores essenciais para a experiência de sítios, cidades, países eles eram reconhecidos socialmente como marcadores permanentes da identidade local e nacional. Em sua volta criaram-se mitos culturais [artificiais] que tiveram efeitos sociais a médio e longo prazo.

Os monumentos no século XX extrapolaram a representação de fatos históricos e incluíram outras manifestações comumente chamadas de obras de arte.

“Por monumento, no sentido mais antigo e verdadeiramente original do termo, entende-se uma obra criada pela mão do home e edificada com o propósito preciso de conservar presente e viva, na consciência de gerações futuras, a lembrança de uma ação ou destino (ou a combinação de ambos).”ⁱ

Conforme Aloïs Riegl, uma obra de arte abrange “toda obra tangível e visível, ou audível, que apresente valor artísticoⁱⁱ”. Assim, as obras são encenações do sujeito social e reflexo de fatores econômicos – o sítio principal da produção simbólica. Monumentos e obras de arte que expressam valores sociais denominados “públicos” são indivisíveis da esfera político-econômica. Eles produzem o real [reproduzindo os valores dos sistemas vigentes].

Nos grandes centros urbanos, os lotes vagos se apresentam como memoriais não-intencionais, advertências sobre o estado das coisas e alertas sobre o sentido da história. O vazio se apresenta em sua dimensão monumental. Qual “real” é evocado? Lara Almarcegui, no seu trabalho *Guia de Terrenos Baldios de São Paulo* para a 27ª Bienal, cria uma reflexão sobre a ausência de uma intenção desses lugares e o projeto do abandono. Trata-se de uma coleção de anti-paisagens, de locais que situam-se fora do contexto da cidade cotidiana. No Brasil, os lotes vagos são onipresentes nas grandes cidades.

Na área metropolitana de Belo Horizonte existem aproximadamente 70.000 áreas desocupadas, vagas, abandonadas, residuais, cheios de lixo, cobertos de mato, terrenos com edificações inacabadas, ruínas ou casas desabadas. São lugares contraditórios considerando o grande número de moradores de rua, as reivindicações dos movimentos de moradia popular, dos sem-tetos e sem-terras. Os lotes vagos são monumentos da desigualdade social que nos remetem à origem da palavra privado [*privare* do latim: roubar]. São memórias das capitânicas hereditárias, das cinco famílias que eram proprietários das terras do *Curral del Rei* onde hoje encontra-se a cidade de Belo Horizonte com mais de três milhões de habitantes vivendo na área metropolitana, da herança pós-colonial e da legislação

em defesa da propriedade privada. São áreas vagas, abandonadas ou inacabadas, sem nenhum valor artístico. Somente lotes urbanos com um cartaz no muro: *Lote vago: adequado para ocupação temporária*.

Os modernistas recusaram a longa tradição de monumentos artísticos ou cívicos e os valores artísticos vigentes. Na primeira metade do século XX, os atos transgressivos das vanguardas históricas anunciavam alternativas artísticas que prometeram destruir os fundamentos conservadores e produzir trabalhos fora do sistema das artes e da esfera da ideologia oficial. Os monumentos tradicionais continuaram a serem erguidos e obras continuaram a serem criadas, mas estabeleceu-se um sítio da contestação por meio do culto à autonomia do trabalho e da figura do artista. No lugar da permanência, pensou-se o trabalho como instrumento de mudança, encenação das contradições sociais, dos pontos de vistas pessoais, como catalisador de transformação individual e coletiva e como crítica das representações sociais oficiais. Os praticantes da antiarte buscavam atacar ao sistema de valores em vigor, denunciar o mundo degradado e pretendiam desmascarar a política das representações oficiais e a determinação simbólica dos mitos culturais.

Criaram-se estratégias contra a hegemonia das representações e a comodificação cultural. Segundo Hal Foster, essas estratégias recusaram unir o imaginário e o simbólico para evocar a condição do sublime e provocaram o retorno aos encontros traumáticos. Procura-se o real “atrás das aparências”, questionando os valores da representação e criticando sua ordem simbólica. Ao contrário dos monumentos feitos pelo poder público para estabelecer domínio por meio da construção simbólica, a política do sujeito autônomo, na sua forma mais radical, visava criar um espaço para o real e para os verdadeiros interesses pessoais, para o fim das práticas artísticas e o início do exercício da vida. Os experimentos das vanguardas históricas não obtiveram uma grande recepção do público geral e nem o efeito emancipatório desejado, mas criaram uma ideologia da experiência imediata em nome da união entre arte e vida. Também não obtiveram sucesso em coletivizar a produção cultural e fracassaram em destruir as categorias tradicionais da arte e fundir a transgressão estética com a revolução social.

Lotes vagos destacam-se do seu entorno, do tecido urbano planejado e dos espaços inseridos na vida cotidiana. Não fazem parte da rotina do dia-a-dia e da experiência da cidade ou da formação da identidade. Lotes baldios parecem ser

lugares sem nenhuma importância histórica ou com nenhum apelo monumental. São lugares ordinários, invisíveis. O ato de atribuir um valor estético ou um valor de uso a esses espaços vagos torna esses espaços visíveis. O projeto *Lotes vagos*ⁱⁱⁱ inspirou-se na coexistência entre cidade formal e informal observada nas regiões periféricas das cidades brasileiras e no urbanismo espontâneo das favelas. Sua proposta inicial remete os jardins de Epicuro e as iniciativas de sustentabilidade e uso coletivo de bens públicos dos terrenos vagos da Alemanha pós-guerra, onde os lotes foram subdivididos em pequenas parcelas^{iv} que eram alugados por preços simbólicos e cultivados como jardins nutritivos dentro do perímetro urbano. O projeto incentivou uma ação coletiva de ocupação experimental dos espaços vagos para formar áreas onde as noções entre o público e o privado são desestabilizadas.

Os cartazes afixados nos muros de lotes em diversos bairros de Belo Horizonte divulgam uma idéia e chamam as pessoas para projetar-se no lote, para sair das suas casas e para ocupar os espaços vazios; para praticar ações no lote ao lado da sua casa, enfrente ao seu prédio ou perto do trabalho ou da escola. Essas apropriações se apresentam como anti-obras; são pequenas expansões do cotidiano, idéias, impulsos, situações vivenciais, que reinventam as rotinas do dia-a-dia, os comportamentos das pessoas na cidade [e também o valor do objeto ou da obra de arte e dos belos e grandiosos monumentos históricos].

A crise dos modelos utópicos da arte e do funcionalismo da arquitetura gerou a necessidade da revisão das práticas modernistas. Nos anos 50, estratégias artísticas incorporaram a experiência subjetiva urbana em que o corpo se tornou um paradigma da participação estética. Nas derivas e psico-geografias, os integrantes da Internacional Situacionista perseguiram uma relação entre um olhar ativo, o corpo e os lugares da cidade. Visava-se criar situações no espaço urbano para liberar e desenvolver a criatividade das pessoas, estratégias e técnicas para uma nova percepção do contexto urbano que reconciliaria o sujeito, os objetos e lugares. Queria-se recuperar um valor utilitário na cidade despersonalizada. Os procedimentos da deriva e da psico-geografia foram desenvolvidos como pontos de partidas possíveis para a superação da alienação e da passividade do sujeito permitindo a reconstrução da cidade por meio das percepções e usos

individuais. Para os Situacionistas a humanização da cidade e a formação de subjetividades dependiam da reinvenção dos espaços públicos, das praças, das ruas e das áreas vazias. Também no Brasil, as áreas abertas e espaços públicos eram vistos como lugares para praticar a espontaneidade, para expressar-se, para unir as pessoas em torno de uma experiência real onde poderia se viver a liberdade espontaneamente e ativar a percepção em um nível fenomenológico. Recuperar uma espontaneidade perdida era considerado ser capaz de ativar a cidade e viver a verdadeira vida em que os sujeitos passivos seriam transformados em participantes ativos. A idéia da liberdade do sujeito e a valorização da espontaneidade e da presença refletem as ambições dos movimentos das neovanguardas. Criaram-se gestos instantâneos, situações precárias e efêmeras. Usaram-se as paisagens e os elementos urbanos como suporte das experiências estéticas, como lugares capazes de provocar simultaneamente estruturas perceptivas e imaginativas.

Nos anos 60 as neovanguardas elaboraram as questões das vanguardas cientes dos seus problemas [ideologia do progresso, hermetismo elitista, presunção de originalidade e exclusividade histórica, apropriação da indústria cultural, etc.] e transformaram a indiferença estética das vanguardas históricas [antiestética] em um novo sistema de valores artísticos; as experiências investigam os parâmetros perceptuais, cognitivos, estruturais e discursivos vigentes e retomaram o fracasso de significação das vanguardas históricas para elaborar suas possibilidades enunciativas contra a situação política. Na tentativa de restaurar a integridade radical do discurso [*conceptual art*], a ideologia da experiência imediata foi agregada a uma consciência sócio-política do contexto histórico. Dessa forma recusou-se a falta de contexto presente da maioria das obras vanguardistas e o não-enquadramento dos seus atos. Re-posicionou-se os trabalhos de arte dentro do presente, porém recusando a idéia da arte pura e a idéia de um futuro utópico. O interesse em processos da *body art*, *performance*, do *site-specific* enfatizaram a presença capaz de produzir uma situação real, mas também a presença que suspende o aqui e agora da realidade existente.

Os artistas neoconcretos transformaram a discussão racionalista do construtivismo para reinventar a relação entre a pessoa e o seu contexto em termos fenomenológicos. Como os Situacionistas, eles buscaram a reconciliação entre pessoas e seu habitat; a esfera pública era vista como um complexo campo de interesses individuais, um campo de guerra

contra a ditadura e a repressão policial que era uma cena constante nas cidades brasileiras. Criaram-se trincheiras, lugares de resistência, refúgios. Arte num processo de crítica social, uma ação política capaz de revelar, atacar e destruir. Estabeleceu-se um sítio de resistência, um estado de liberdade e experimentação.

Para Hélio Oiticica, o espaço vivido e a atividade estética estavam ligados ao ambiente urbano. Os *Penetráveis* de Oiticica transformam o espaço plástico de seus trabalhos anteriores^v em um ambiente a ser experimentado. Os ambientes de Oiticica são espaços virtuais que simulam espaços públicos e jardins. Inserindo-se neles o espectador experimenta a relação entre homem e o mundo. Entra-se em uma situação ambiental, na qual a ordem ainda não se instalou e as coisas surgem de acordo com a necessidade criativa das pessoas envolvidas. Isso permite que o espectador improvise e descubra seus limites e desejos. Para Oiticica, ser um sujeito significa assumir a falta de um lugar social e encontrar sua posição marginal. Vistos dessa maneira suas manifestações ambientais eram lugares de transgressão nas quais os sinais de utopias se materializavam^{vi}, de gestos instantâneos, de acontecimentos, de experiências incondicionadas. A reinvenção de um momento vivido.

Um acontecimento paradigmático da arte Brasileira no contexto das neovanguardas e da aproximação entre arte política e urbanismo foi o evento *Do corpo à terra*, que teve lugar em 1970 no Parque Municipal, nas ruas e em outras áreas urbanas de Belo Horizonte. Devido à situação política dos anos 1960 e 70 os artistas relacionaram questões da arte conceitual, de *happenings*, *land art* ao mesmo tempo em que criaram metáforas de liberdade por meio de experimentações físicas do corpo e situações participativas e, em outros casos, praticaram arte de guerrilha^{vii}. Os artistas lidaram com as questões políticas em obras como *Monumento a Tiradentes* e *Trouxas ensangüentadas*, entre outras. Em *Monumento a Tiradentes* Cildo Meireles queimou galinhas amarradas em volta de um totem-monumento em protesto à construção de uma imagem de um passado heróico e dos homicídios políticos praticados pela ditadura militar. Na mesma coletiva, sem deixar explícito que se tratava de uma intervenção artística, Arthur Barrio jogou 14 trouxas de carne, ossos e sangue no rio Arrudas, o rio/esgoto da cidade, lembrando os desaparecimentos de pessoas. As ações no contexto *Do corpo à terra* tiveram um apelo político, eles comentaram e encenaram os assassinatos do regime militar e os grupos de

exterminio. *Do corpo à terra* foi uma manifestação que incorporou aspectos geográficos, ecológicos, urbanísticos, políticos e históricos. Era um evento composto por ações que visavam desorganizar e desestabilizar o sistema totalitário, deslocando as ações condicionadas da vida cotidiana e criando desordem. O aspecto experimental do evento e da arte brasileira dos anos 60/70 era uma combinação perturbadora de arte e política que justapos o primitivo, a nostalgia, o moderno, o nacional e o internacional. Praticou-se uma síntese antropofágica do presente usando uma mistura de alegoria e ironia para praticar um ato político de crítica social.

A ideologia da experiência imediata das vanguardas históricas e a dimensão enunciativa dos trabalhos neovanguardistas não aboliram as identidades tradicionais da arte, mas testaram formatos, molduras e sistemas da experiência estética. No lugar da reconciliação romântica entre arte e vida parece que se optou por continuar a explorar e denunciar os limites da arte para produzir alguma coisa que podemos chamar de vida. A arte pública poderia ser percebida como uma experiência coletiva que nega a autonomia e a auto-expressão do artista. Vivenciam-se situações ou momentos de arte em conjunto, dentro de um contexto maior. Os trabalhos situam-se dentro do mundo de objetos reais que são definidos em termos do lugar de inserção e o tempo de relação. Eles acontecem na interface física com o exterior e com o espaço mental de cada espectador. Em 1964 Harold Rosenberg inventa o termo ‘objeto ansioso’ para referir-se a trabalhos que parecem minar seu próprio estatuto de arte para perturbar a percepção visual convencional.

Depois de perturbar a visualidade convencional da cidade por meio da ocupação inusitada, qual é a imagem que se gostaria colocar no lugar dos lotes vagos? É interessante estabilizar esta visão? Como criar “ações ansiosas” que perpetuam ou prolongam a desestabilização entre o privado e o público?

O projeto *Lotes vagos: ação coletiva de ocupação experimental* transformou lotes de propriedade privada em espaços públicos temporários em Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais (2005) e em Fortaleza, Ceará (2008) e resultou no documentário *Metros quadrados* (2006). No projeto inicial os proprietários emprestaram lotes para a execução de diferentes ações que eram concebidas a partir de discussões entre arquitetos e artistas sobre vago, propriedade e sustentabilidade. O desenvolvimento das propostas dependia de diálogos e negociações em diversas

instâncias envolvendo diferentes pessoas no planejamento e na implementação dos projetos. Algumas propostas tinham em vista a permanência e integração da comunidade local e outros a intervenção e interrupção da vida cotidiana. Reativou-se um tipo de atitude e atenção infantil, uma espontaneidade ou um espaço para a projeção de desejos ou de uma lembrança agradável. As maneiras de organizar essas experiências passaram por diferentes instâncias informativas, negociação, conversas e momentos de justificativas. O projeto convidava ao diálogo, a uma proposição aberta, a construir uma visibilidade ou um uso. O espectador era chamado a participar de uma ruptura na ordem do visível e do pensável, do realizável e a re-visitá-lo seu próprio comportamento. Os artistas e arquitetos propuseram uma idéia que foi desenvolvida em conjunto com proprietários, moradores, comunidade, transeuntes, vizinhos, etc. As pessoas eram chamadas para inventar práticas que ainda não existiam e projetar suas idéias, vontades e esperanças.

Nos anos 60 e 70, os artistas incorporaram elementos e dinâmicas urbanas. Práticas artísticas eram baseadas na combinação de partes heterogêneas e na interação de pessoas. A participação era vista não somente como processo de criação, mas também como resultado. Arte como encontro entre pessoas, engajadas em diálogo. Criaram-se discursos que substituíram o aspecto revolucionário e a atitude de confronto das manifestações anteriores por uma idéia de uma convivência benigna e harmoniosa das diferenças. Termos como *escultura social* e *estética relacional* refletem em uma concepção contemporânea de arte pública. Processos dialógicos que valorizam as questões éticas, a coletividade, a participação ativa e, em alguns casos, a anulação do artista. A idéia da *estética relacional*, criada por Nicolas Bourriaud, coloca a distância ou proximidade entre o artista, o observador e o trabalho artístico no centro das atividades. Na criação coletiva, artistas e espectadores respondem aos estímulos que provém da percepção do entorno em relação ao próprio corpo. A partir dessa experiência corporal individual-coletiva estabeleceu-se um sentido que provém das possibilidades de afectar e ser afectado. Através da percepção sensível das coisas e do ato como potencial de diferenciação e de invenção interfere-se no sistema vigente, nas formas constituídas e representações estabelecidas. As práticas da experimentação e da conscientização do exterior criam um mundo em obra.

O projeto *Lotes Vagos* permite formas de utilização ou ocupação temporária de espaços urbanos por meio de processos dialógicos. São revelados conflitos que permeiam as relações entre o público e o privado. Conflitos que muitas vezes geram ações e ocupações inusitadas como uma praia no centro de Belo Horizonte ou redes de descanso no centro comercial de Fortaleza. A aparição de ocupações transitórias na cidade promovem uma discussão sobre as várias facetas da esfera pública. Arte pública neste contexto se manifesta como urbanismo provisório que amplia a cidade em suas dimensões físicas e estruturas imaginárias. O projeto *Lotes Vagos* cria transgressões no cotidiano, comportamentos impróprios e possibilidades de interação entre grupos locais heterogêneos. Apoiado em diferentes sujeitos forma-se uma nova cena local durante o desenvolvimento de uma proposição ou a implementação de uma ação em conjunto. As ações são resultados das demandas e desejos dos habitantes, apoiados pelo capital cultural e simbólico dos artistas.

A ordem ambiental das ocupações acontece no domínio da experiência cotidiana, criando um estado de invenção. O corpo é convidado a uma postura ativa, não-estática e propositiva. Uma postura ativa em relação à construção de espaços possibilita estar consciente, criticar a situação presente e pensar em outras maneiras de se viver. As derivações, as intervenções e os deslocamentos contribuem para promover, segundo Jacques Rancière, uma ação política pelo deslizamento da norma hegemônica. Um exercício contra as representações fixas e repetições; ao se transformar em praticante a pessoa afirma o lugar singular que ocupa no mundo. A colaboração entre as diferentes pessoas envolvidas depende da ativação recíproca e da interação do espaço físico e do espaço imaginário. Os lotes se transformam em lugares reais e imaginários^{viii} e são capazes de simultaneamente ser material simbólico e real construído. Para Rancière a formação de uma comunidade política é baseada no encontro discordante de percepções individuais. A arte, como incentivadora da multiplicidade de manifestações e interesses permite as colisões das diferenças. A maioria das ações nos lotes é a inscrição dessas relações conflituosas que resultam em um evento antagônico, deslocando as rotinas cotidianas. A imprecisão das propostas permite a projeção de desejos e convida ao comportamento que transgride a

propriedade privada. A ocupação coletiva de uma propriedade particular é uma profanação do capitalismo.

As situações instauradas nos lotes trouxeram algo de precário, de frágil e aberto que permitia a possibilidade de colaboração e de reinvenção da situação a todo instante a partir de um deslocamento de uma relação familiar com a imagem da cidade. A não-predeterminação das relações resultou em uma autonomia da ação possibilitando que cada pessoa participasse da construção da proposta. O envolvimento das pessoas na ação aboliu a divisão entre artista e espectador; criou-se uma instância pertencente a todos, à coletividade composta por indivíduos em volta do interesse de ocupar o lote.

Em vez de afirmar um lugar fixo, um lugar comum, transforma-se o espaço ocioso em um palco dos processos do cotidiano e das práticas sociais. Uma forma de teatralidade dos *outros espaços* de Foucault, heterotopias que participam em discussões políticas ao levantarem perguntas sobre como as pessoas lidam com os espaços da cidade e como se produz realidade. A teatralidade dos lugares outros, estruturas dialógicas e encontros como possibilidades de resistência ao isolamento, ao capitalismo e ao esvaziamento da vida contemporânea, como uma rede de *sites* reservados para a projeção do sujeito e do encontro. Lugares vivos, imersos numa rede de conexões em constante movimento. Arte pública como conjunto de proposições que formam essa rede e constroem essa série de relações e esses espaços instáveis do encontro.

Os conceitos históricos da arte pública continuam presentes na arte hoje. A proliferação do termo e seus significados nos séculos XX e XXI apontam que o aspecto público é um elemento constitutivo para as práticas artísticas considerando a sua idealização, materialização, localização, temporalidade e recepção. Os diversos registros históricos da dimensão pública da arte criaram parâmetros para as manifestações artísticas contemporâneas e continuam relevantes para discutir as manifestações da arte urbana e a busca do indivíduo e do coletivo por afirmação no espaço social.

O monumento persiste em termos de escala, permanência e estabilidade. Mas o espaço público não é mais visto como uma categoria fixa, que forma a percepção, mas uma invenção, uma organização ficcional de espaços desiguais, heterotópicos. O projeto *Lotes Vagos* lida com o lote como heterotopia, presente por meio da ocupação coletiva. As ações,

em vez de comemorar ou rememorar o passado, reagem à falta, às necessidades e à escassez. A cidade é vista como espaço da alteridade, no qual a arte e o urbanismo participam na formação do corpo social ou de estratégias de sobrevivência.

O antimonumento como lugar do protesto, sítio de resistência e do desafio das estruturas de poder existentes e na forma de ativismo político continua presente. Os cartazes nos muros e as ações criadas perturbaram a percepção da propriedade privada, remetendo à resistência ao poder político autoritário dos anos 60 e 70 e ao aspecto efêmero. A idéia de instabilidade dos trabalhos intervencionistas valoriza um estado ambíguo que desnorteia a ordem convencional das coisas. Pratica-se a permanência do inacabado, do instável como dimensão pública, não uma propaganda autoritária ou uma hegemonia benigna de um grande evento alegre. As ações se localizam entre uma imagem de sociabilidade coletiva e uma espacialização da fronteira de uma brecha entre o privado e o público. Não se tratam de modelos de uma harmonia preconcebida; são lugares vivos, uma ação para construir um presente e inventar um futuro.

Os centros urbanos são ambientes onde diálogos, convivência, direito a cidade e lazer tornaram-se palavras de ordem, mas muitas vezes não são praticados. Pensar o diálogo como arte pública é possível devido à crescente separação dos diferentes domínios sociais e uma eliminação de encontros ou confrontos. Desta forma, terrenos baldios e esforços coletivos de arte são uns dos lugares, como praças, feiras, igrejas e praias, onde as pessoas podem se encontrar. Não se trata em abolir as diferenças, mas perceber as desigualdades. As práticas relacionais e colaborações estratégicas com diferentes pessoas e grupos sociais criam movimentos que valorizam idéias alternativas de uma concepção utópica. Confronta-se a arte com sua própria contradição; por um lado a crítica dos problemas existentes e deficiências que resultam do desenvolvimento desenfreado das cidades contemporâneas [empobrecimento, desigualdade social, poluição, violência, corrupção, exploração, tráfico de drogas] e, por outro, a esperança e a promessa de um futuro melhor ou possibilidade de realidades urbanas paralelas. As ações, além de falar do abandono, da exclusão e da falta de acesso, indicam a importância da contribuição individual para a cidade presente e a cidade futura por meio de uma situação imprópria – o uso coletivo de uma propriedade privada.

As proposições artísticas são intervenções no tecido urbano que indicam locais de transgressão. Essas pequenas profanações projetam sinais de utopia, possibilidades

fictícias, resistência ao isolamento e ao fracasso no plano individual. Inventam-se outros espaços, redes de pontos de intersecções não-homogêneos, lugares especializados e reservados para a projeção do sujeito. O projeto *Lotes vagos* permite as construções de espaços que confrontam os artistas e público/participante com um campo vivencial que não predetermina as relações, mas estabelece uma dinâmica para a produção de identidade, em vez de um marcador de identidade. Colocando a arte pública nesse âmbito capaz de fornecer as condições da prática social, podemos perceber as práticas artísticas como eventos [de arte pública] que são marcados pela abertura e mudança, em vez da limitação e permanência.

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ⁱ Aloïs Riegel, *O culto moderno dos monumentos: sua essência e sua gênese* (Goiânia: Editora da UCG, 2006), 43.

ⁱⁱ Aloïs Riegel, *O culto moderno dos monumentos: sua essência e sua gênese* (Goiânia: Editora da UCG, 2006), 44.

ⁱⁱⁱ O projeto foi idealizado por Louise Ganz e Breno Silva em 2004.

^{iv} Os *Schrebergärten*, utilizados para o plantio e para o descanso, existem até hoje em muitas cidades alemãs.

^v Invenções e Núcleos.

^{vi} Celso Fernando Favaretto, *A Invenção de Hélio Oiticica* (São Paulo: EdUSP, 1992), 121.

^{vii} Termo escolhido por Frederico de Moraes para referir-se à alguns trabalhos do evento.

^{viii} Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns. Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2006), 62.

Curriculum Vitae

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In 2009 she participated in the Tirana Biennale of Contemporary Art in Albania, the First International Forum for Research: Transnational Latin American Art from 1959 to the Present Day, at the University of Austin, the International Congress Deslocamentos in Ouro Preto and in the event Dialogues: Strategies of Failure coordinated by Mabe Bethônico.

Abstract - Guilherme Wisnik

Intense nationalism strongly marked Brazilian culture in the period of the 1960's and 70's. On the architecture field, this period relates to the displacement of its most relevant production center, from Rio de Janeiro to São Paulo, with emphasis to Vilanova Artigas who begins, in 1959, to erect visibly naked reinforced concrete buildings whose formal expression results from large scale structural solutions. This production aligns with the so-called 'English Brutalism', and with the work of Le Corbusier in the Post-War times. Artigas, however, never accepted any reference to the external influences in his work, getting even to violently attack, in some texts from the 50's, the messianic figures of Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright, accusing them of being "yankee imperialism agents". The emergency of Brasil's Counterculture, particularly explosive as of 1967, brings along conflicting information in regard to this context. It would take, precisely a foreigner, the Italian Lina Bo Bardi, to be the responsible figure for incorporating external references to the orthodox and developer rationalism of architecture in São Paulo and also for bringing them along as seminal contribution to the other arts. It is important to understand that her unique contribution to Brazilian countercultural vanguards cannot be explained without her Italian background. As it is worth mentioning, for her Marxist approach through Antonio Gramsci, for her modern concern for vernacular arts through cinematographic Neo-Realism and *Arte Povera*, and for her relative opposition to the rationalism preached by Le Corbusier.

Transnational Latin American Art

International Research Forum for Graduate Students and Emerging Scholars
University of Texas at Austin, 6-7 November 2009 (ACES Building 2.302, Avaya Auditorium)
In collaboration with the University of the Arts London & the University of Essex (UK)

Brutalismo e Tropicalismo

GUILHERME WISNIK

Abstract

Intense nationalism strongly marked Brazilian culture in the period of the 1960's and 70's. On the architecture field, this period relates to the displacement of its most relevant production center, from Rio de Janeiro to São Paulo, with emphasis to Vilanova Artigas who begins, in 1959, to erect visibly naked reinforced concrete buildings whose formal expression results from large scale structural solutions. This production aligns with the so-called 'English Brutalism', and with the work of Le Corbusier in the Post-War times. Artigas, however, never accepted any reference to the external influences in his work, getting even to violently attack, in some texts from the 50's, the messianic figures of Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright, accusing them of being "yankee imperialism agents". The emergency of Brasil's Counterculture, particularly explosive as of 1967, brings along conflicting information in regard to this context. It would take, precisely a foreigner, the Italian Lina Bo Bardi, to be the responsible figure for incorporating external references to the orthodox and developer rationalism of architecture in São Paulo and also for bringing them along as seminal contribution to the other arts. It is important to understand that her unique contribution to Brazilian countercultural vanguards cannot be explained without her Italian background. As it is worth mentioning, for her Marxist approach through Antonio Gramsci, for her modern concern for vernacular arts through cinematographic Neo-Realism and *Arte Povera*, and for her relative opposition to the rationalism preached by Le Corbusier.

1. Vilanova Artigas

"Arquitetura paulista", "Escola Paulista", "Brutalismo paulista", ou "Brutalismo caboclo", são alguns dos termos que têm sido empregados para designar a

produção de um grupo de arquitetos sediado em São Paulo, sob a liderança de João Batista Vilanova Artigas (1915-1985), abrangendo o final dos anos 1950 e as duas décadas seguintes. Suas características gerais são a adoção de um partido estrutural ousado como definidor da forma, o largo emprego do concreto “bruto” aparente (armado ou protendido), a volumetria compacta encimada por uma cobertura iluminante, a predominância de empenas cegas obstruindo uma relação mais franca entre interior e exterior, e a ênfase na criação de uma espacialidade interna contínua e transparente, balizada por pátios, jardins ou grandes vazios internos capazes de trazer atributos “paisagísticos” dos espaços externos para o interior dos edifícios.¹

Erigidos em uma cidade desprovida de beleza natural, caótica, e construída pela força predatória da especulação imobiliária, esses edifícios deram as costas à trama urbana, procurando reconstruir internamente espaços de uma sociabilidade nova, coletivista e mais austera. Isto é: uma cidade em laboratório. Sim, pois é a urbanidade o horizonte essencial dessa arquitetura paulista, em radical contraposição aos “bibelôs” da cultura doméstica burguesa, que tem na “agorafobia” o complemento simbólico de uma hipertrofia de valores ligados ao conforto intimista.²

É o que explica, ou ajuda a explicar, tanto a forçada rudeza material desses edifícios – desapegados de qualquer valor sentimental associado à matéria, que aludisse a algum resíduo de afeto artesanal –, quanto a sua razoável homogeneidade formal. Sejam eles residências de classe média, estabelecimentos de ensino, clubes de recreação ou estações de transporte, por exemplo, são tratados todos como grandes equipamentos públicos, com estruturas dimensionadas para vencer grandes vãos, a preferência pelo emprego de genéricas rampas ao invés de “caprichosas” escadas, e ainda, em casos mais radicais, a supressão de janelas para os dormitórios ou salas de aula, a criação de paredes que não chegam ao teto (e portanto não separam os cômodos em ambientes “secretos” e estanques), e o uso de materiais escandalosamente urbanos em ambientes domésticos, como o piso

¹ Ver Guilherme Wisnik, “Doomed to Modernity”, in *Brazil's Modern Architecture*, ed. Adrian Forty and Elisabetta Andreoli (London: Phaidon Press, 2004).

² Ver Walter Benjamin, “Experiência e Pobreza”, in *Obras Escolhidas I* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1985).

de asfalto que adentra a sala de estar da Casa Millan (1970), de Paulo Mendes da Rocha.

Levando-se em conta o evidente contraste entre essa arquitetura paulista e a variada leveza aérea da produção carioca que a precedeu³ – e tida até então como sinônimo de brasileira –, é impossível não notarmos uma reorientação de rumos na arquitetura do país a partir da virada dos anos 50 para os 60, que tem como *background* a profunda mudança na obra de Le Corbusier no contexto econômico e cultural do pós-guerra, a qual se dá o nome de brutalismo.

Como termo comum a ambas, podemos destacar, de imediato, o uso do concreto como massa escultórica (o *béton brut*), aludindo a uma valorização simbólica do peso e da opacidade em contraposição à leveza e à transparência, e a incorporação de um discurso eminentemente auto-reflexivo de modo a expor as marcas do processo construtivo (as fôrmas de madeira decalcadas no concreto), evitando assim a reificação do edifício como uma imagem desprovida de história e trabalho humano. Características que também se afinam à didática exposição das instalações hidráulicas e elétricas presentes na arquitetura do chamado *New Brutalism* inglês de Alison e Peter Smithson, tal como definido por Reyner Banham, bem como à sua intransigente defesa da “verdade dos materiais”. Em resumo, nota-se em todos esses “brutalismos” uma redução expressiva da arquitetura à sua realidade tectônica, numa operação estética que se pretendeu carregada de motivações essencialmente éticas.

Artigas, no entanto, nunca aceitou de bom grado o qualificativo de “brutalista” para a sua arquitetura, chegando a ironizar a designação de sua obra como uma *ricerca brutalista* pelo crítico italiano Bruno Alfieri nas páginas da revista *Zodiac* em 1960⁴, e a censurar a carga de “irracionalismo” do brutalismo europeu, cujo conteúdo ideológico era, segundo ele, “bem outro”.⁵

³ Apesar de notáveis excessões, como o edifício do Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (1953), de Affonso Eduardo Reidy, que pode ser considerado um elo entre as escolas carioca e paulista.

⁴ Ver Bruno Alfieri, “João Vilanova Artigas: Ricerca Brutalista”, *Zodiac* n° 6, 1960.

⁵ Vilanova Artigas, “Em Branco e Preto”, *Arquitetura e Urbanismo – AU* n° 17, 1988, 78.

Membro destacado do Partido Comunista Brasileiro (PCB) desde 1945, Artigas vincula de forma militante sua atuação profissional a uma prática política. Assim, empenhado em definir e defender as bases de uma arquitetura nacional, signo de emancipação e independência política e cultural do país rumo ao seu desenvolvimento econômico, evitou o quanto pôde vincular a sua produção a um influxo externo – naquele momento, associado de modo um tanto dogmático ao imperialismo estrangeiro. E, mais ainda, a uma corrente que se espalhava pelo mundo (França, Inglaterra, Japão, Índia, Itália, Argentina, entre outros⁶) de modo razoavelmente homogêneo, correndo o risco de aparentar-se a um genérico estilismo de linguagem, como o chamado *International Style*, situado justamente na antípoda de sua posição.

Discípulo dissidente de Artigas, Sérgio Ferro é quem comenta de forma mais franca o contexto dessa negada influência européia. Defendendo a especificidade irreduzível da arquitetura paulista daquele período, Ferro critica o formalismo estetizante da produção arquitetônica do casal Smithson, cuja “ética” expressaria menos um compromisso político real do que um certo “tíquete popular”. E, de roldão, faz restrições severas a uma das obras emblemáticas do brutalismo corbusiano, o convento de La Tourette (1957), onde a massa construída é, segundo sua visão, muito mais a expressão de um *décor* monumentalizado do que do desenho da estrutura propriamente dita, em franca oposição à linha seguida por Artigas e os arquitetos paulistas.

Sem negar o sentido da influência, Ferro, no entanto, defende uma subversão dos seus propósitos originais, pois “numa atitude cabocla, antropofágica”, diz ele, “engolimos o brutalismo e o transformamos”.⁷ Note-se, porém, que o recurso ao termo “caboclo”⁸ atesta a defesa de uma específica adaptação local do brutalismo, de cunho popular, que Ferro usa com o objetivo explícito de “chatear” seu velho mestre, uma vez que incide

⁶ Com destaque para figuras como Le Corbusier, Alison e Peter Smithson, James Stirling, Kenzo Tange, Kisho Kurokawa, Kiyonori Kikutake, Tadao Ando, Vittoriano Viganó, Balkrishna Doshi, Amancio Williams e Clorindo Testa, entre outros.

⁷ Sérgio Ferro, “Reflexões Sobre o Brutalismo Caboclo”, in *Arquitetura e Trabalho Livre* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2006), 258.

⁸ O caboclo é o mestiço do branco com o índio, servindo também como designação do caipira, do interiorano, morador da província ou da roça.

exatamente num ponto sensível de discordância entre ele e Artigas: o miserabilismo.

Considerando-se todos esses fatores, me parece que a causa mais profunda da desconfiança de Artigas em relação à herança do brutalismo europeu está no sinal negativo atribuído ao movimento, sobretudo no que se refere à obra tardia de Le Corbusier. Tomando-se a leitura canônica de Banham, depois subscrita por Kenneth Frampton, o seu brutalismo arcaizante representa um momento de “grave angústia”, em que o arquiteto – agora imbuído de um senso de realismo antiutópico – abandona sua antiga crença na “civilização maquinista”, e denuncia o aspecto atrasado (ainda artesanal) da construção civil num momento em que a técnica era usada mais para a destruição em massa (a guerra) do que para qualquer avanço progressista e edificante.⁹ Um bom termômetro do choque provocado por essas obras está expresso na reação indignada de James Stirling ao primitivismo estético e construtivo das casa Jaoul (1952-56), em Neuilly, declarando ser perturbador encontrar a aproximadamente meia milha de distância dos Champs-Élysées aquelas casas feitas de modo quase medieval por operários argelinos munidos apenas de pregos e martelos.¹⁰

Para Artigas, ao contrário, considerando-se o atraso econômico e social brasileiro, era necessário investir-se de uma atitude eminentemente positiva e abertamente favorável ao desenvolvimento das forças produtivas nacionais, isto é, da indústria, mesmo que sob a condução política de um regime ditatorial. Assim, no seu importante texto intitulado “Uma falsa crise” (1965), o arquiteto combate a crítica (européia) ao Movimento Moderno, que o condenava por associar o racionalismo à tecnocracia, isto é, a uma crença cega nos benefícios da técnica, que teria se provado enganosa e perversa. Diz Artigas: “é preciso não confundir, em qualquer análise do movimento (moderno), a técnica da construção, cujo domínio pela arquitetura é potencialmente possível, com a técnica em geral, cuja necessidade de comando, na linguagem dos pioneiros, não nos comovia com os mesmos

⁹ Ver Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* (London: Architectural Press, 1966); and Kenneth Frampton, “L’autre Le Corbusier: la Forme Primitive et la Ville Linéaire”, *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui* n° 249, 1987.

¹⁰ Ver James Stirling, “From Garches to Jaoul: Le Corbusier as Domestic Architect in 1927 and 1953”, *Architectural Review* n° 705, 1955, 151.

overtones. Até um tanto ao contrário.”¹¹ Quer dizer, à parte uma nítida discordância com o elogio eufórico e “pioneiro” da técnica *per se* – em evidente referência ao livro *Mechanization Takes Command* (1948), de Siegfried Giedion –, Artigas defende o uso racional da tecnologia na construção civil. E completa: “nas circunstâncias históricas em que vivemos, os países subdesenvolvidos desejam a industrialização, quaisquer que sejam as suas decorrências, pois que, partindo das teses funcionalistas, seria possível o seu controle, já agora para transformar o nosso mundo, no qual o atraso do desenvolvimento capitalista, ou a sua convivência com o feudalismo, provoca espetáculos de miséria social muito piores.”¹²

Feitas as contas, enquanto o brutalismo de Le Corbusier representa um voluntário passo atrás em relação ao progressismo técnico do Movimento Moderno, o brutalismo de Artigas se pretende um passo à frente, respondendo a especificidades locais do Brasil com vistas à superação do seu atraso.¹³ Nesse sentido, o seu modelo de desenvolvimento para o país (e, de modo correlato, de atuação profissional) evita sistematicamente cair no miserabilismo ou na valorização da criatividade popular e artesanal, mantendo a firme convicção de que toda criação transformadora deveria partir do “desenho” traçado por um corpo técnico ilustrado e amparado pelo Estado. Não à toa, apesar da franca contradição ideológica em que se inscreve, essa arquitetura paulista encontrou um grande campo de expansão durante os anos de “milagre econômico” sob a ditadura militar, nos quais as portentosas obras de infra-estrutura (estradas, pontes, barragens, usinas, cidades novas) impulsionaram o crescimento industrial do país, e embasaram a ideologia nacionalista de um “Brasil grande” e auto-suficiente.¹⁴

¹¹ Vilanova Artigas, “Uma Falsa Crise”, in *Caminhos da Arquitetura* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2004), 105. Note-se que o texto foi escrito no ano seguinte ao golpe militar, seguido do seu exílio temporário no Uruguai, e de sua situação de clandestinidade no país.

¹² Vilanova Artigas, “Uma Falsa Crise”, in *Caminhos da Arquitetura* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2004), 105.

¹³ A não percepção dessa diferença alimenta enganos de leitura que se perpetuam até hoje, por exemplo, nas leituras “regionalistas” ou *low-tech* da obra de Paulo Mendes da Rocha, surgidas por ocasião do prêmio Pritzker recebido por ele em 2006.

¹⁴ Lembre-se, por exemplo, da campanha ufanista “O petróleo é nosso”. Contudo, é preciso notar que essa auto-suficiência era ilusória, uma vez que baseada no aumento galopante da dívida externa.

Não são pequenas as pressões e contradições envolvidas em tal projeto de emancipação. Preso e exilado pelos militares desde a primeira hora (1964), e cassado da Universidade de São Paulo em 68, Artigas sabia que essa aposta representava um difícil *tour de force* – paradoxal, porém necessário. Vem daí, penso eu, a exagerada e heróica didática estrutural de seus edifícios – os enormes vãos e a acentuação plástica dos esforços a que estão submetidos –, cujas “proezas e audácias”, em suas palavras, expressam o seu caráter “impaciente”¹⁵, antecipatório. Isto é: formalizam por antecipação um desenvolvimento que deveria vir a reboque, mas que, afinal, não veio. E se tomarmos uma obra tardia como o Museu Brasileiro da Escultura (1988), de Paulo Mendes da Rocha – bem posterior, porém legitimamente herdeira dessa tradição –, perceberemos a alegorização daquele projeto como uma fantasmagoria: o grande vão livre já não é modelar nem funcional, apenas paira incólume sobre um território que, escavado em subsolo, resiste a incorporar-se a essa ordem técnica.

2. Lina Bo Bardi

Para o texto de abertura ao primeiro número da revista *Habitat* (1950), criada e dirigida por Lina Bo Bardi (1914-1992) como veículo editorial do Museu de Arte de São Paulo (Masp), a arquiteta elege como tema de ensaio as casas de Vilanova Artigas, fazendo um rasgado elogio da sua “moral severa” e “quase puritana”. Cada casa de Artigas, diz ela, “quebra todos os espelhos do salão burguês.”¹⁶

A escolha parece precisa, na medida em que inscreve uma posição firme da arquiteta estrangeira – então recém chegada ao país (1946) – no meio da vanguarda arquitetônica paulistana. Lina, contudo, certamente divergirá de muitas das posições mais sectárias defendidas por Artigas naquele início dos anos 50, tais como a condenação da arte abstrata como sendo uma arma de colonização cultural do “imperialismo yankee”¹⁷. Mas

¹⁵ Ver Vilanova Artigas, “Sobre Escolas”, in *Caminhos da Arquitetura* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2004), 131.

¹⁶ Lina Bo Bardi, “Casas de Vilanova Artigas”, in *Lina por Escrito* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2009), 69.

¹⁷ Ver Vilanova Artigas, “Caminhos da Arquitetura Moderna”, in *Caminhos da Arquitetura* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2004), 48.

tanto o sentido de vinculação forte entre arquitetura, ideologia e um projeto de “formação nacional”, quanto a irritação visceral pelos fetiches da cultura burguesa – no caso de Lina, o “horror” pelos carpetes e ar-condicionados, ou pelo “comodismo dos estofados e dos controles remotos”¹⁸ – são aspectos comuns a ambos. Afinidade que se torna evidente, sobretudo, nas suas obras mais identificadas ao brutalismo, como o Masp (1957-68), o Sesc Fábrica da Pompéia (1977), e as austeras cadeirinhas de madeira feitas para teatros e auditórios (Masp, Sesc, Teatro Oficina), projetadas não com o objetivo de proporcionar um descanso relaxante e passivo ao espectador, mas orientadas pelo conceito brechtiano de “distanciar e envolver”¹⁹, no qual está suposto um certo incômodo criativo.

Apesar de firmemente sintonizado ao léxico da arquitetura racionalista internacional, e mais especificamente às questões do brutalismo (e sua acomodação local, voltada para a ênfase no partido estrutural e o elogio da técnica), o projeto do Masp é essencialmente uma derivação, segundo Lina Bo Bardi, da sua experiência de “cinco anos no nordeste”.²⁰ Quer dizer, é uma tradução pessoal da intensa “experiência de simplificação” vivida por ela na Bahia entre 1958 e 64, junto à vitalíssima cultura popular existente ali. Essa é, em suas palavras, a base real da “arquitetura pobre” do Masp, feita de soluções diretas, despidas e desprovidas de requinte ou afetação, onde a arquiteta buscou contrariar frontalmente o “esnobismo cultural” da elite paulistana.²¹

Essa deliberada busca de uma arquitetura expressivamente “pobre”, ou “feia”, também é a tônica do seu projeto para o Sesc Pompéia, na mesma cidade. “O bonito é fácil”, diz ela, “difícil é o feio, o verdadeiro feio. Espero

¹⁸ Ver *Lina Bo Bardi*, ed. Marcelo Carvalho Ferraz (São Paulo: Instituto Lina Bo e P. M. Bardi, 1993), 100.

¹⁹ *Lina Bo Bardi*, ed. Marcelo Carvalho Ferraz (São Paulo: Instituto Lina Bo e P. M. Bardi, 1993), 226.

²⁰ Refere-se ao período que vai do final de 1958 ao começo de 1964, encerrado com o golpe militar, que inviabiliza sua permanência em Salvador. O projeto do Masp começa em 1957, mas é apenas após a sua volta a São Paulo, em 64, que ele ganha contornos mais próximos ao do projeto finalmente realizado.

²¹ Ver *Lina Bo Bardi*, ed. Marcelo Carvalho Ferraz (São Paulo: Instituto Lina Bo e P. M. Bardi, 1993), 100.

que o conjunto esportivo do Sesc Fábrica da Pompéia seja feio, bem mais feio do que o Museu de Arte de São Paulo. É um Silo, *Bunker, Container*.”²²

Dito isso, seria preciso compreender melhor o modo pelo qual Lina toma a cultura popular como emblema de resistência à massificação da cultura de consumo, ao mesmo tempo que não a reduz, romanticamente, a um baluarte antimoderno. Muito ao contrário, para Lina a potência da cultura popular do nordeste residia exatamente na sua possível contribuição à modernidade brasileira, porque “indigesta, sêca, dura de digerir”. Daí o “feio” como expressão de violência, acusação, em sintonia como a “estética da fome” proposta por Glauber Rocha em 1965. Pois, se verdadeiramente assimilado e processado pela modernização, esse “pré-artesanato” primitivo poderia dar origem a opções culturais no campo do desenho industrial “mais aderentes às necessidades reais do país”²³, e distintas da *finesse* européia ou dos genéricos *gadgets* de consumo da sociedade capitalista norte-americana. Como disse Darcy Ribeiro, “Lina queria que o Brasil tivesse uma indústria a partir das habilidades que estão na mão do povo, do olhar da gente com originalidade. Poderíamos reinventar os talheres de comer, os pratos, a camisa de vestir, o sapato. Havia toda uma possibilidade de que o mundo fosse refeito.”²⁴

Tratava-se, naquele momento (anos 50 e início dos anos 60), de pensar passagens entre as esferas erudita e popular, fazendo com que o erudito pudesse incorporar o popular por dentro, de modo a gerar uma cultura arquitetônica e de *design* criativa e singular.²⁵ Está aí o grande interesse de Lina Bo Bardi pelo Brasil – e pelo nordeste em particular –, cuja cultura era então, na sua opinião, mais “africana-oriental” que “ocidental”: um

²² Lina esclarece que o conceito de “arquitetura pobre” deve ser pensado “não no sentido de indigência mas no sentido artesanal que exprime Comunicação e Dignidade máxima através dos menores e humildes meios.” Ver *Lina Bo Bardi*, ed. Marcelo Carvalho Ferraz (São Paulo: Instituto Lina Bo e P. M. Bardi, 1993), 220.

²³ Lina Bo Bardi, *Tempos de Grossura: o Design no Impasse* (São Paulo: Instituto Lina Bo e P. M. Bardi, 1994), 12-13.

²⁴ In Antonio Risério, *Avant-Garde na Bahia* (São Paulo: Instituto Lina Bo e P. M. Bardi, 1995), 121.

²⁵ Um belo exemplo é a escada do Solar do Unhão, em Salvador, em que Lina aplica o sistema de encaixes de madeira usados nos carros de boi do interior do país a um desenho absolutamente límpido, geométrico e racionalista.

lugar “rico de seiva popular”.²⁶ Seiva que, na Europa – exausta e corrompida por guerras e degradação moral (fascismo) – já se havia esterilizado há muito tempo. O “povo”, segundo Lina, é o verdadeiro detentor da liberdade do corpo, da desinstitucionalização do comportamento. Esse é o “modo de ser do Povo Brasileiro”, diz ela, “ao passo que, nos países ocidentais altamente desenvolvidos, é a classe média (incluindo nesta classe um certo tipo de intelectual) que procura angustiadamente uma saída em um mundo hipócrita e castrado cujas liberdades eles mesmos destruíram há séculos.”²⁷

Pode-se dizer que Lina realiza uma antropofagia às avessas, devorando a cultura local a partir de uma ótica estrangeira. Sim, pois antecipa uma revalorização da operação estética oswaldiana – a transformação do atraso do país em vantagem – num momento em que a geração que fará o tropicalismo e o cinema novo ainda está se formando. Muitos deles, vale dizer, exatamente em Salvador, num ambiente de fermentação cultural ímpar protagonizado pela presença de importantes artistas e pensadores de vanguarda europeus, como o fotógrafo e etnólogo Pierre Verger, o músico dodecafônico Hans-Joachim Koellreutter, e a arquiteta Lina Bo Bardi, lá conhecida como “Dona Lina”.

Com sua compreensão heterodoxa da cultura, armada por um olhar antropológico propenso a enxergar maior valor nas diferenças do que na produção de consensos, Lina atravessa o nacional-desenvolvimentismo militante que dominava o ambiente arquitetônico paulista munida de um repertório que trazia, certamente, da Itália. Refiro-me sobretudo às suas leituras de Antonio Gramsci, e à marcante convivência com Gió Ponti e todo o movimento pela valorização do artesanato iniciado com a exposição “Arquitetura Rural Italiana”, montada por Giuseppe Pagano na VI Trienal de Milão (1936) – além da proximidade óbvia com o universo criativo do neo-realismo cinematográfico e das questões que levariam ao surgimento da *Arte Povera*.

Assim, “Dona Lina” torna-se uma referência fundamental para figuras como Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Maria Bethânia e Rogério Duarte, além

²⁶ Lina Bo Bardi, “Um Balanço Dezesesseis Anos Depois”, in *Tempos de Grossura: o Design no Impasse* (São Paulo: Instituto Lina Bo e P. M. Bardi, 1994), 11.

de amiga próxima de Glauber Rocha, e parceira criativa de Zé Celso Martinez Corrêa, criando cenários para as montagens de *Na selva das cidades* (1969) e *Gracias señor* (1971), além de projetar o próprio espaço do novo Teatro Oficina (1984). Quer dizer, identifica-se a artistas que estão na proa do movimento contracultural que agita o Brasil nos anos 60, virando do avesso a leitura ideológica que se fazia do país e do seu processo de modernização. No contexto arquitetônico brasileiro de então, Lina é a única figura a fazer a ponte com as demais vanguardas artísticas, tais como o tropicalismo, o teatro oficina, o cinema novo e arte ambiental surgida no interior do movimento neoconcreto. Tendo como elemento comum a todos a percepção de uma sociedade movente e fraturada, que surge da falência do ideário nacional-desenvolvimentista do período anterior, que, entre outras coisas, havia amparado o otimismo da bossa nova e de Brasília.

Nas palavras de Zé Celso, aquela revolução contracultural guiou-se pela intenção de destruir um “Brasil de papelão, pré-americano”, no sentido do “reencontro da participação coletiva”, e da “procura da Outra História do Brasil, da que vinha das resistências dos escravos, dos índios, dos imigrantes, dos seus auditórios loucos para participar...”.²⁸ Na mesma direção, Hélio Oiticica falava em “dissecar as tripas dessa diarreia” Brasil. Isto é: “mergulhar na merda”, expor ostensivamente o “cafona” para desbloquear a eterna “prisão de ventre nacional”: o velhaguardismo, o “bom gosto”.²⁹

No caso da música popular, o mesmo espírito de negatividade alimentou o tropicalismo, na incorporação da música comercial “cafona”, dos instrumentos eletrônicos “importados” e do ruído dissonante, na colagem heteróclita de referências várias com vistas à dissolução dos gêneros musicais, e na construção paródica e alegórica de imagens sincréticas do Brasil, em que se justapõem modernidade internacional e arcaísmos

²⁷ Lina Bo Bardi, “O Projeto Arquitetônico”, in *Lina por Escrito* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2009), 154.

²⁸ Zé Celso Martinez Corrêa, “Longe do Trópico Despótico”, in *Primeiro Ato – Cadernos, Depoimentos, Entrevistas* (São Paulo: Editora 34, 1998), 126.

²⁹ Ver Hélio Oiticica, “Brasil Diarreia”, in *Hélio Oiticica* (Rio de Janeiro: Centro de Arte Hélio Oiticica, 1996), 19.

patriarcais. A maior delas, focalizando justamente um país grotescamente monumentalizado na imagem da capital recém inaugurada.³⁰

Não podemos nos esquecer que Brasília havia significado o ponto culminante de um processo de modernização iniciado três décadas antes, e que o representara triunfantemente sob o signo ecumênico da “síntese das artes” – no qual sempre se percebeu o nítido protagonismo da arquitetura no comando do processo de modernização das artes no país, como deixou claro Mário Pedrosa.³¹Ocorre que depois do golpe de 64, e de todas as transformações culturais e ideológicas por que passou o mundo naquele momento de virada histórica – e que estão na origem do chamado pós-modernismo –, o caminho seguido pela arquitetura no Brasil se descola do que foi trilhado pelas demais artes. Se a corrente dominante, liderada por Vilanova Artigas, mantém a firme convicção no modelo desenvolvimentista do período anterior, amparado em um ideário nacional-popular e numa crença no progresso técnico, Lina Bo Bardi, por seu lado, abre um difícil canal de comunicação com as demais vanguardas artísticas do país, cujo projeto estético estava imbuído de uma negatividade que visava atacar aquela imaculada ilusão de desenvolvimento, abrindo as portas a manifestações artísticas mais porosas e heteróclitas. Talvez por isso a sua obra tenha permanecido tão idiossincrática, e isolada em meio ao panorama da arquitetura moderna brasileira.

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³⁰ Referência à canção “Tropicália” (1967), de Caetano Veloso. Explicando a origem da canção, Caetano declara que Brasília, “o sonho mágico transformado em experimento moderno” e, ao mesmo tempo, “o centro do poder abominável dos ditadores militares”, sem ser nomeada, teria que ser o centro da “canção-monumento aberrante”, erguida “à nossa dor, à nossa delícia e ao nosso ridículo.” Caetano Veloso, *Verdade Tropical* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1997), 185.

³¹ Segundo Mário Pedrosa, “no Brasil a primazia no plano artístico coube à arquitetura”, pois os jovens arquitetos é que “foram os verdadeiros revolucionários”. Ver Mário Pedrosa, “A Arquitetura Moderna no Brasil”, in *Dos Murais de Portinari aos Espaços de Brasília* (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981), 258.

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POST 9-11 PUBLIC TERROR IN ART FROM LATIN AMERICA

Sara Angel Guerrero-Rippberger
2009

I think even more powerful than America's military arsenal has been its hold over the media in some way. I find that very frightening [...] just as much as America believes in freedom at home, or free speech, or the freedom of religion, outside it believes in the freedom to humiliate, the freedom to export terror, and the freedom to humiliate, which is a very important thing because that's what really leads to the rage.¹

Arundhati Roy

For me, liberation comes from the notion that art cannot do much in challenging war. Yet it can dismantle its discourses in order to understand its effect on our being as humans. Art then becomes the only space in a war situation where dignity can be retained.²

Azza El-Hassan

What is the meaning of freedom and terror in a post-9-11 world? The question needs translation to de-code contemporary meanings. What is freedom? Or terror? Who is included in the term 'world'? The answers change depending on national, regional and ideological perspectives. In the United States (US), the mainstream media often say 'world' when referring only to the US, as in one of its favorite post-9-11 question, *Will the world ever be the same?* The post-September 11, 2001 language created by mass media in the US is based upon a conservative rhetoric about liberty, terror and war -- both conservatives and liberals have used the language of 9-11 to frame other manifestations of public terror around the globe. Such has been the case with the 2004 Madrid train bombings, named 3-11 or 11-M in Spanish, and the 2005 London bus bombings named 7-7. Yet 9-11 has seldom been contextualized within the history of public terror in the Americas. Placing US rhetoric and 9-11 back into the context of its region can perhaps shed new light on the significance of global terror and freedom at the beginning of the 21st century.

Is there a role for art to play in this equation? One way to gain perspective on both 9-11 and terror in a post-modern context may be through artist narratives from Latin America. Many artists working in Latin America have commented on themes of liberty and terror both before and after 9-11. They have called attention to the effects of terror on the public within a larger national and regional history, making visible that which governments would erase. While US media created a post-9-11 language of symbols to describe public terror, artists were also using multi-layered images to address similar issues. When examined together, as two simultaneous yet differing narratives on public terror in the Americas, new meaning emerges. Within a visual language of symbols, a plurality of voices on the subject emerges as well, shaped by gender, class and sexuality.

Such art narratives on public terror have taken center stage recently in many international events in the art world, with works by Teresa Margolles, Oscar Muñoz, Doris Salcedo, and Regina José Galindo featuring prominently in large biennials, traveling exhibitions, and eminent collections.³ Both artist-led and curatorial decisions are behind the re-appearing of these pieces around the world, in small and large venues, and on foreign and home turf. What truths or misconceptions do these art pieces (and their multiple showings) hold? Can they be seen as historical documents in the socio-political history of the Americas, and do they have meaning for a public unfamiliar with contemporary art?

Can there be such a thing as a Post 9-11 era?

As the world becomes more and more globally postmodern -- and less and less universal in the modern sense -- is it appropriate to say that an event from one country can become the marker of an era, or a universal way of thinking? Most critical thinkers in the age of post-colonialism (Appadarai, Canclini, Deleuze, Dussel, Spivak, Said, and Mosquera to list a few out of many), agree that Western/Northern-centered notions of universalism and modernity should be questioned. "Whereas modernization as a narrative placed national units on a temporal continuum from 'backward' to 'advanced,'" says political scientist and curator Susan Buck-Morss, "globalization does not presume the historical time of Western progress. Global space entails simultaneity, overlap, coherencies, incoherently superimposed."⁴

In this new millennium, of which 9-11 was a part, art about mass fear, violence, and crises has continued to surface. In 2005, the international art world was shown a visual response to militarized state terror in Regina José Galindo's 2003 performance *Quien Puede Borrar las Huellas?*⁵ for which she won the Golden Lion award for best young artist at the 2005 Venice Biennale. She writes of her motivation to create the piece:

"When it was announced [in 2003] that Efraín Ríos Montt [leader of a military regime responsible for atrocities during Guatemala's 36-year civil war] had managed to win acceptance as a presidential candidate, I was in my room, and I suffered an attack of panic and depression. I cried out, I kicked and stomped my feet, I cursed the system that rules us. I decided then and there that I would take to the streets with my shout and amplify it."⁶

Her shout became a silent performance during which she walked through the streets of Guatemala City, dipping her feet in human blood and leaving a trace of crimson footprints between the old National Palace and the Constitutional Court. A woman's footprint became a symbol that could be easily understood by her fellow citizens who witnessed the events she referenced with blood, as well as by an international art audience. Her message is a meditation on the very lives of her country-people, people who have been considered both peripheral and disposable by a state version of national history.

In the Venice Biennale of 2009, Teresa Margolles used human blood from drug war-related deaths to mop the floors of a crumbling Venetian palace, part of her solo show in the Mexican Pavilion, *¿De qué otra cosa podríamos hablar?*⁷ The blood was collected in rags from crime scenes, a by-product of some 5,000 people who lost their lives in murders related to drug trafficking in Mexico during 2008. The national Mexican newspaper, *Reforma* called it 'Mexican narcoterror' in their headline, *Exhiben en Venecia narcoterror mexicano.*⁸

In 2009, Margolles' act of transporting blood between the so-called third and first worlds also speaks to the fear of contamination across regional and transnational borders. Mexican curator Helena Chávez MacGregor describes the significance of Margolles' work as challenging the beliefs of European audiences. Chávez calls the symbolic nature of the work total 'contamination' or 'infection' because it drenched of the Venice palace in Mexican blood.⁹ This act challenged the recent international fear surrounding Mexico in the Spring of 2009, when it was depicted in global media as the original contamination site of the swine flu frenzy of fear. During this time, the media had helped to create what one critic called "False mental constructs of borders – the kind that cause citizens to imagine a flu strain like this one invading their nations from other lands."¹⁰

Margolles and Galindo's themes speak of a national amnesia when it comes to the state's role in erasing their own crimes against the public. Examining these stories and messages from the periphery of society against the backdrop of concurrent political events might help in moving towards a pluralistic world view, a 'pluriverse'¹¹ as Dussel calls it, in which political languages and philosophies from different parts of the world meet to re-conceive the whole idea of post-modern politics.¹² Such a project might find a way to create dialogue about artist narratives about public terror in a mainstream public sphere, and offer ways for new audiences to compare art narratives with media narratives.

Terror in the 21st Century

Art and resistance have been expressed in a plurality of voices from many parts of the Americas. The divide between North and Latin America presents a perplexing situation with boundaries more imaginary than real. Cuban curator and cultural theorist Gerardo Mosquera writes of an art of the South which "can act as a ghetto, a check for the multicultural quota systems and cultural correctness, or even as a space for new exoticism."¹³ Art narratives have arguably become exoticized when put on display in the North. But a lumping together of countries of the South, which Mosquera describes as "more to do with geography of power than with a physical geography" can also sometimes work in favor of artists, creating "a solidarity between the excluded in their critique and action in the face of power."¹⁴

In the beginning of the 21st century, Mexico has also been marked by contrasting imaginings of terror and the public. In 2008 the Mexican government played up an event in Michoacán, but ignored other deadlier acts of terror like its recent 'war on drugs' which has claimed 3,400 lives between 2008 and 2009, in Ciudad Juarez alone.¹⁵ On September 15, 2008, a bomb killed 8 people and injured hundreds of others on the eve of independence day festivities in Morelia, Michoacán, birthplace of President Felipe Calderón.¹⁶ Rumors spread quickly, calling it the first terrorist attack in Mexico. In a public statement, Calderón said the attacks were against the whole of Mexico, and his response was to militarize the whole state of Michoacán.¹⁷ Calderón did not mention any other attacks against the public which Mexican artists like Teresa Margolles have sought to highlight -- such as rising drug war related murders, human rights abuses of women in Ciudad Juarez, or even the recent disappearances of activist student leaders like Noel Pavel Gonzalez, occurring over the past three years with systematic and unsolved kidnappings since 2000. Calderón did mention that he had increased military and security forces in the state of Michoacán, and soon after it was placed under military rule.

Shortly before this incident, a different kind of soldier had invaded public spaces in the country's capital, Mexico City. Black stencil silhouettes of machine gun toting troops appeared randomly as graffiti in public spaces, creeping up on passing cars and pedestrians. Created by an anonymous artist, they were first sighted around the start of the war in Iraq that followed 9-11. The images echoed troops being deported from the US – a militarized presence that was made quite invisible in the US (except for the body bags returning home, more often than not with bodies of youth of color). But the graffitied military presence in public spaces re-inserted a visual reminder of militarized urban America.¹⁸

As governments and their media began to re-define the meaning of terror, they fashioned a new vocabulary out of multi-layered images. Home-made videos, keffiyehs, beards, bombs,

flags, skyscrapers, and airplanes, for example, have all taken on new meanings. American cultural theorists Noam Chomsky and Richard Falk added another image to this list -- that of the mirror. As a way of understanding 9-11, Chomsky encouraged Americans to look “in the mirror,” and examine the role their government has played in state-sponsored mass destruction. The mirror image is one of the reckless violence caused by both US government sponsored terrorism and insurgents like Al-Qaeda. Artist narratives on this subject terror use objects like car engines, ID photos, footprints, empty chairs and bicycles, black crosses and femur bones. Unlike government and conservative media sponsored messages, art narratives speak about loss. Loss of life, loss of knowledge, loss of memory, loss of community – and they refuse to be complacent about crimes against the public.

The public and public space in the 2000s

Notions of the public and public space are key to answering questions about national crises. There is not one, but many publics. By nature of individual difference, multiple publics will always co-exist in any given region, space or time. There are also invisible publics, described as invisible masses or armies. An invisible network of terrorists is lurking around every corner, according to mainstream US media, waiting to attack the innocent without warning or compassion. In many parts of Latin America, there is an invisible mass of the disappeared which is also hiding behind every corner, according to activists and artists.

Argentinean cultural theorist and art critic Ana Longoni describes loss as embodied in the present of the survivors. Referring to a past militarization in the Americas, she writes, “El desaparecido, arrancado violentamente de la calle, del aula, de la fabrica, de su casa, y arrojado a un vacio del que nunca volvio, es aquel del que no se conoce cuerpo ni historia desde ese momento.”¹⁹ This absence is also memorialized in the witness, in which case the absent becomes visible once again “el [sobreviviente] se condensa no solo la memoria del terror sino tambien la narracion del yo politico, del militante, activista, guerrillero, combatiente apresado, torturado, caido pero no asesinado.”²⁰

Thus, the artist who comments on public terror becomes the artist survivor, the artist activist, or the artist guerrilla. An exhibition named *The Disappeared* addresses such issues. Comprised of art from Latin America, it toured Latin America and the United States (2006-2010). Their images depict an absence of those who have died through the memorializing of every objects: empty bicycles, bones, erased faces, and ID style photographs from expired licenses of past eras. “Through their art, these artists fight amnesia in their own countries as a stay against such atrocities happening again,” read the introductory exhibition text.²¹ But it was shown during a time when people continued to disappear at the hands of state and systemic violence, and a time of US militarization in Afghanistan and Iraq. On September 17, 2006, during the first month of the exhibition’s presentation in Buenos Aires, Julio Lopez disappeared, one day before he was scheduled to testify as key witness in the genocide trial of ex-chief of police, Miguel Etchecolatz. “Where is Julio López?” demonstrators in the same city chanted in mass demonstrations.

Like many artists in *The Disappeared*, Doris Salcedo has given new meaning to discarded everyday objects, using empty chairs to speak about patriotism and the masses in Colombia. Her used, empty chairs of various sizes and colors stand in for mass violence in her ‘mass grave’ creating by installing a clutter of chairs on the outside of a building for the 2003 8th

Istanbul Biennial, and as an homage to Colombians killed outside the Palace of Justice in Bogotá, where she lowered 280 chairs during the course of two days for an installation in 2002. The chairs, like other ordinary objects used in *The Disappeared*, signify an emptiness in everyday life.

An even wider presentation of these narratives on loss could inspire increased plurality of voices both within the art world, and within the larger public space. A ‘pluri-voice’ told through art may be a means of working towards Dussel’s pluri-verse.

Voices from Latin America on Public Terror

In addition to commenting on state-sponsored terror, artists provide visual texts on systemic violence against the public, specifically about mass violence against women, gang members, the resource-poor, and other marginalized groups in society.

In *Bravo, Lomas de Poleo, Anapra y Cerro de Cristo Negro*, (2005) Teresa Margolles, places marginalized territories in the center of public art spaces, memorializing the deaths of more than 400 sexually abused women in Ciudad Juárez. She visits the sites of their deaths, travels the routes from their home to their jobs from which many were abducted, and memorializes them with bricks created from earth collected at each murder scene.

Utilizing the language of gangs and popular culture in a working class neighborhood in Panama City, Brooke Alfaro’s *Nueve*,²² (2003) featured a projection of two parallel videos of rival gang members singing the same song, projected on local buildings in the neighborhood of the gangs. The video piece was shown as a part of MultipleCity, a contemporary art exhibition curated by Adrienne Samos and Gerardo Mosquera.²³ It was also presented in the context of the Singapore and Venice Biennales of 2006 and 2003, respectively. In a similar way that Galindo’s *Quien Puede Borrar las Huellas?* speaks to both local and international audiences, *Nueve* bridges a gap between work meant for an art world audience and work meant for a working class popular public, a sector of the public which Gerardo Mosquera calls the art world’s “abandoned public.”²⁴

Regina José Galindo’s work *Perra*,²⁵ 2005, addresses violence against another marginalized group – women – who ironically are part of a global near-majority. Before a live audience, she carves the word *perra* with a small knife into the skin on her leg, and the letters rise out of blood. When questioned if her statement about violence against women in Guatemala (where unsolved crimes of this nature are listed in the thousands), relates to the women of Juárez, she responds:

There are many theories for why so many women are killed in Guatemala. Not all deaths originate from the same direct causes, but all murders are committed under the same premise: that it is done, it is cleaned up, and nothing happens, nothing occurs, nobody says a thing. A dead woman means nothing, a hundred dead women mean nothing, three hundred dead women mean nothing. The difference between Ciudad Juárez and Guatemala is that in Guatemala women are not only killed, but first they are subjected to horrible forms of torture, cut into little pieces and decapitated..²⁶

At times it can seem that art narratives about terror compete for authenticity. Art about *Las Muertas de Juárez*,²⁷ has garnered criticism for cultural appropriation, some artists are accused of using the publicity around the murders to gain recognition for their own work

rather than for the victims. There have been rumors of opportunists creating art about these women – especially in cases when the artist comes from a very different socio-economic or regional background than the working class factory workers who've been disappearing over the past ten years. Do these women, commonly referred to as *Las Muertas*, who endured poverty and human rights abuse as exploited factory workers in life, matter as much to the public as they do after their deaths? Who fought on their behalf to change their life circumstances and devastating poverty before they were murdered?

And still, the murders continue. The experience of this fear of violence and death is documented by art that embodies themes of on-going loss and historicized terror, themes which have become internalized in a collective memory and collective doubt about the future. Curator, psychoanalyst and cultural critic Suely Rolnik ponders, “How is one to convey a work that is not visible, as much as it is only produced in the sense-based experience of each viewer?”²⁸ Rolnik's theoretical work about the trauma of the dictatorship in what she calls, “the resonant body of the artist” is based upon her exploration of Brazilian artist Lygia Clark's work. In Cildo Miereles' *Red Shift* (1967-84), Rolnik reads the memory of loss. She describes the politics of long-endured military violence in Brazil as something that had become so ubiquitous in the consciousness of the Brazilian public in the 1970s that it was part of the cultural psyche.²⁹ This memory of trauma and normalized violence from the state is represented by the red color used in *Red Shift*, in which a 1970s middle class urban Brazilian home is created of almost entirely red objects, and connected to a separate room with a blood-like red liquid spilling out onto the floor from a small bottle.

Oscar Muñoz's *Project for Memorial* (2005), shown as a part of *The Disappeared*, and other large exhibitions, could also be read as what Rolnik calls “provok[ing] an immersion in the sensations lived within the experiences they enabled.”³⁰ Muñoz' metal plate etchings of faces from ID style portraits, which appear only as the viewer stands close enough to the work to breathe onto the plates (and which begin to disappear almost as soon as the warm air evaporates), provoke a variety of images about terror for the viewers, by making them a catalyst, or active participant, in the appearing and disappearing of the faces. Art about terror mirrors this action, as it invokes the absent and disappeared within the political context of national agendas of forgetting.

Conclusion

An overwhelming amount of artwork shows how multiple public terrors are still very present in a decade pre-occupied with an image of public safety; all the while violent events continue to mar this image. As artists Loring McAlpin, Meira Marrero, Jose Toirac point out with their room-sized installation for the 10th Havana Biennial, In *God We Trust, America's Most WANTED*, “the American psyche post 9-11 [is] a room we still inhabit”³¹ If we see 9-11 and it's ensuing American rhetoric as a room, perhaps it exists within the larger house of global public terror in the 21st century. Other rooms might be inhabited by different events which have caused both fear and retrospection, such as 7-7, 3-11 or the War on Drugs in Mexico. Whether haunting public memory, or art exhibitions, the threat to the well-being of the public psyche is an problem that lingers, hovering around the everyday rhythms of cities around the world. Perhaps a better question to ask rather than ‘Will the world ever be the same?’ Is, ‘Will the World ever be safer, and will the quality of life be better for all of its people -- all of its publics?’

NOTES

- ¹ Arundhati Roy cited in: Schechter, Danny, "Understanding the 'Why' of September 11," *Nieman Reports* (Winter 2001), 1.
- ² El-Hassan, Azza, "Art and War," in *Unplugged: Art as the Scene of Global Conflicts*, ed. Gerfried Stocker and Christine Schöpf (Ostfildern-Ruit : Hatje Cantz, c2002), 280.
- ³ For example, to name a few out of many examples, works by these artists have been featured in: the Jumex Collection, Venice Biennials 2005 and 2009, and 2003 Istanbul Biennial. Regina Jose Galindo was featured in a solo 2009 exhibition at the Oxford Museum of Modern Art, titled *The Body of Others*. Jose Munoz was featured in a solo 2008 exhibition at London's Institute for International Visual Arts, titled *Mirror Image*.
- ⁴ Susan Buck-Morss, *Thinking Past Terror Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left* (London:Verso, 2003), 5.
- ⁵ In English: *Who Can Erase the Traces?*
- ⁶ Goldman, Francisco. "Regina José Galindo," *Bomb Magazine*, Issue 94 (Winter 2006).
- ⁷ In English: *What Else Could We Talk About?*
- ⁸ Loosely translated in English: *Narcoterror to be Exhibited in Venice* in: Riveroll, Julieta, "Exhiben en Venecia narcoterror mexicano," *Reforma*, May 27, 2009, Culture Section, National Edition.
- ⁹ Hernández, Daniel, "Temple of blood: Teresa Margolles at the Venice Biennale," *Intersections Blog*, entry posted 28 May, 2009.
- ¹⁰ Giordano, Al. "How The NAFTA Flu Exploded," *The Narco News Bulletin*, 29 April (2009), <http://www.narconews.com/Issue57/article3512.html>. Giordano also described the phenomena as a "'swine flu' media frenzy" adding that "US-Mexico trade policy created a time bomb... a gigantic Petri dish in the form of pig farms to generate bacon and ham for international sale."
- ¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 516.
- ¹² Susan Buck-Morss also describes a similar project in *Thinking Past Terror Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left* (London:Verso, 2003), 5.
- ¹³ Mosquera, Gerardo, "The World of Differences: Notes about art, globalization, and periphery" *Universes in Universe Magazine*, The Marco Polo Syndrome (1995) <http://www.universes-in-universe.de/magazin/marco-polo/e-mosquera.htm>.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid*.
- ¹⁵ Vullaimy, Ed, "Life and brutal death in the world murder capital," *The Observer*, October 4, 2009, World Section, UK Edition.
- ¹⁶ Notimex, "Condanan gobernadores explosiones en Morelia," *Milenio.com* (16 September 2008), <http://www.milenio.com/portal/index2.php>.
- ¹⁷ Téllez Cortés, Cecilia, "Unidad nacional contra terrorismo, exige FCH," *Crónica*, Miercoles 17 de Sep, 2008, National Edition. Loosely translated in English: "All Mexicans, regardless of beliefs, regardless of ideological positions, must unite in the complete repudiation of these cowardly attacks. All Mexicans, without exception or constraint, must condemn these attacks against Mexico. Since yesterday, I instructed the federal forces, particularly the Mexican Army, to provide all necessary support to the Government of Michoacán, ensuring order in the state and reinforcing the actions of the Federal Forces against these

criminals. The people of Mexico, particularly on this highly significant date, must stand united against those who want to see us divided. Anyone who claims that fear will hold our society hostage and immobilize us is mistaken.”

- ¹⁸ These images were seen by the author on the streets of Mexico City in 2008. They were also featured in: Tàpies, Xavier A. and Eleanor Mathieson, eds., *Street art and the war on terror : how the world's best graffiti artists said no to the Iraq war* (London: Rebellion Books, 2007).
- ¹⁹ Longoni, Ana, *Traiciones: La Figura Del Traidor En Los Relatos Acerca De Los Sobrevivientes De La Represion* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2007), 23. Loosely translated in English: “The one who was disappeared, ripped violently from the street, the classroom, the factory, the home, and thrown into a void from which he never returned, is that being about which no history is known since that moment.”
- ²⁰ Ibid. Loosely translated in English: “The [survivor] condenses not only the memory of terror but also the narrative of the political self, the militant, the activist, the guerrilla, the freedom fighter arrested, tortured, killed but not murdered.”
- ²¹ Reuter, Laurel and Lawrence Weschler, *The Disappeared* (New York: Charta, 2006).
- ²² In English: Nine.
- ²³ Garrett, Craig, “MultipleCity” *Art Nexus* no. 82 (Summer 2003).
- ²⁴ Mosquera, Gerardo, “The World of Differences: Notes about art, globalization, and periphery” *Universes in Universe Magazine*, The Marco Polo Syndrome (1995) <http://www.universes-in-universe.de/magazin/marco-polo/e-mosquera.htm>.
- ²⁵ Loosely translated in English: *Bitch*.
- ²⁶ Goldman, Francisco. “Regina José Galindo,” *Bomb Magazine*, Issue 94 (Winter 2006).
- ²⁷ In English: The dead women of Juárez.
- ²⁸ Bang Larsen, Lars and Suely Rolnik “A Conversation on Lygia Clark’s Structuring the Self,” *Afterall Magazine* Issue 15 (Spring/Summer 2007), 31.
- ²⁹ Rolnik, Suely, “Detour towards the unnameable: Poetic and politics in the work of Cildo Meireles,” (paper presented at the Seventh International Symposium on Contemporary Art Theory in Mexico City, Mexico, January 29-31, 2009).
- ³⁰ Bang Larsen, Lars and Suely Rolnik “A Conversation on Lygia Clark’s Structuring the Self,” *Afterall Magazine* Issue 15 (Spring/Summer 2007), 32.
- ³¹ McAlpin, Loring, Meira Marrero and Jose Toirac. *In God We Trust, America’s Most WANTED* (exh. cat., 10th Havana Biennial, 2009) Havana, 2009.