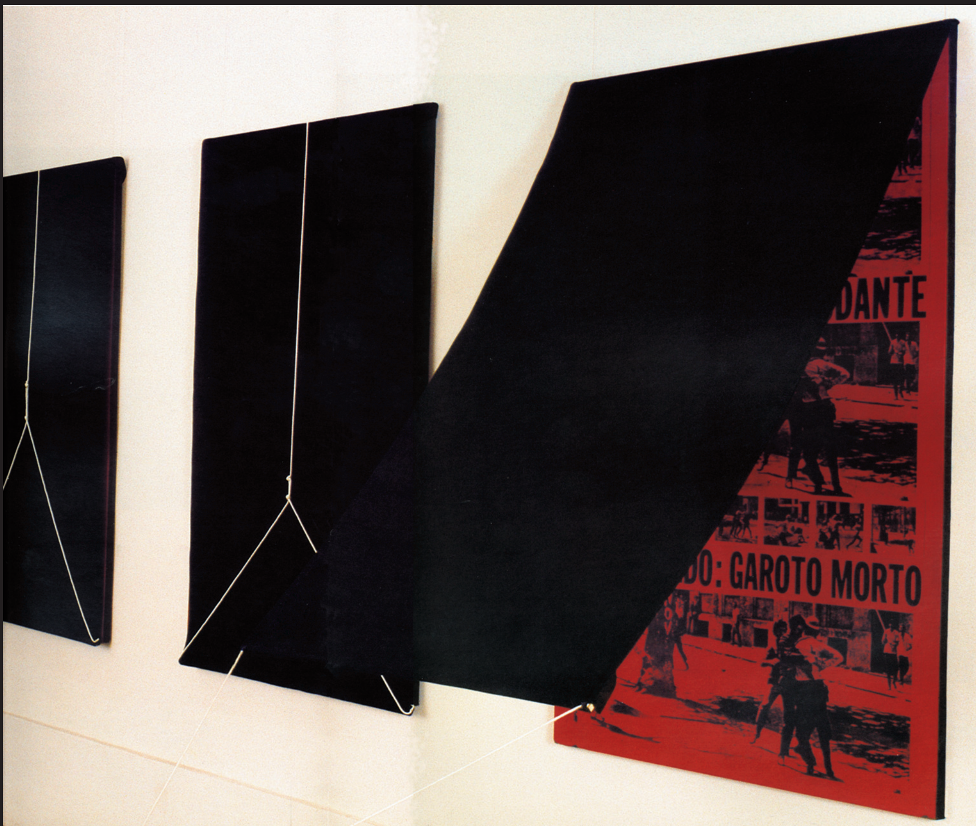
Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation



Luis Camnitzer

Joe R. and Teresa Lozano Long Series in Latin American and Latino Art and Culture

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3 *The Terms*

"INDEFINITIONS" AND DIFFERENCES

Art history developed an enormous array of terms that, though useful for the powers that administer it, turn out to limit and distort the perception of what actually happens on the periphery. One could start with the definition of what constitutes a professional artist. The mainstream has a much more disciplinary and narrow definition of professionalism than the periphery has. As a consequence, the investment in branding a style is much higher, and a larger body of work and greater consistency is required to be an "accepted" artist in the mainstream. While on the periphery a good, important idea may give an artist recognition and have a cultural effect, mainstream artists have to prove themselves with a whole line of production. This, in turn, often casts a light of "unprofessionalism" onto periphery artists when they are judged under mainstream standards.

Closer to the topics of this writing, problems abound with the term "conceptual art," at least when we try to cover all the artistic activities that took place around the world and have their point of departure in some form of concept. The term is generally used in that curiously inclusive/exclusive way that is customary for hegemonic styles in art: "Yes, it is international and not local," and, "No, you are not really part of it because your stuff is different." Benjamin Buchloh is one author who, early on and in the end correctly, limited the term "conceptual art" to Europe and North America. Increasingly, the label has been reserved for the stylistic shape that conceptualism took in North America (language, grid paper, a degree of ephemeral quality, documentation, etc.). It should therefore designate a movement based on its formal attributes.[1]

The clarification of this distinction between "conceptualism" and "conceptual art" was one of the topics addressed in the exhibition Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s. It seemed appropriate to place North American conceptual art as one example among the many forms of conceptualist strategy that appeared between the 1950s and the 1980s. While the international critics accepted this decision, most of the reviewers in the United States were deeply offended by it and refused to accept a distinction between the terms. The gallery

guide of the *New Yorker,* in a text that appeared repeatedly during the weeks of the exhibit (June–August 1999), was wonderfully clear and succinct in its reaction:

> 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.

As threatening as this clarification between "conceptual art" and "conceptualism" may be to U.S. views and beliefs, without it, the use of either term creates serious distortions. The use of "conceptual art" as a blanket term gives importance to any formal resemblance to conceptual works produced in the cultural centers and ignores how art addresses its audience. Those works that deviate from the canon because they introduce elements (in both form and content) of local interest or relevance are ignored (as those of Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark were for a long time) or seen as less important. Ironically, it is often those works that are not necessarily accessible outside their primary audience that have a greater local impact and cultural importance.

Moreover, this more extended use of "conceptual art" doesn't let us see that the same works of art and events may play different roles and have different projections in different histories.[2] This would be a problem with any stylistic movement, but it becomes particularly dangerous in this case, since one of the major claims of mainstream conceptual art, as a postminimalist form, is an aspiration to purity. Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner try to isolate meaning from any form, narrative, or material support as far as possible. Thus, as a form of "spiritualization," this search for purity sometimes leads to arcane but heated elucidations. One of them, for example, is the difference there may be between the "declarative" and the "performative" qualities of a work of art (i.e., some works by Kosuth, Weiner, and Robert Barry in the U.S. context). The maintenance service required to hone this identity often makes people sound like refined theologians.[3]

Although I am advocating a separation in the use of "conceptual art" and "Latin American conceptualism," I do not want to suggest that Latin American conceptualism belongs among the "aboriginal" expressions of the continent, or

that it is an aesthetic or a strategy sprung in total isolation from the cultural centers. The concept of avant-garde and the categorization of art in those terms certainly are European imports, and most post-Columbian art cannot and should not be discussed without an awareness of the influences of the mainstream. Colombian artist Nadín Ospina (1960–) addresses this issue with his fake pre-Columbian sculptures, which are manufactured by professional counterfeiters and include Disney characters and the Simpson family rendered in Toltec-style ceramic and stone sculptures.[4]

More seriously, Argentinean artists César Paternosto (1931–) and Alejandro Puente (1933–) thought to derive their abstractions from the pre-Columbian tradition, ultimately applying a Western formalist vision to a culture that is inaccessible to our experience.

It is amusing to see how mainstream evaluations of art produced on the periphery manage to overlook local idiosyncrasies. It is precisely the view one has *from* the periphery that introduces the most important differences. Thus, what places Latin America on the "art periphery" is not the fact that artists get inspired by the mainstream, but the particular way they see the mainstream's accomplishments. Mostly, and particularly until the sixties, mainstream art was seen on the periphery through reproductions. There are stories about the disappointment Latin American constructivist artists felt when they discovered imperfections in Piet Mondrian's originals. In reproductions, they had seemed to be immaculate "technical" paintings. Little experience or knowledge of the context of art was to be found in the pages of a book.

It is how these achievements are reused and adapted to the socioeconomic and cultural conditions that make them local, useful, important, and independent. In the transposition, they often lose their origin and become new works. Because of this, we should also examine here the use of "derivativeness," one of the favorite terms of derision used toward art of the periphery. The same peripheral expressions dismissed as "derivative," when seen from the periphery, may represent a functional appropriation and transformation blended and syncretized with local creations. Shapes, though adopted, are put into a different context with different meanings. These expressions can be seen as examples of recycling, similar to what happens with machinery on the periphery. Parts of "foreign machinery" are used and reused for one's own specific purpose, sometimes with the help of wire and duct tape.

The word "derivative" is used as a form of historical placement. Work is evaluated by where it is placed within the timeframe of the mainstream and not by its effects on the audience it addresses. Because this bears implications for the respect

(or lack of it) accorded to works so described, "derivative" is used to discriminate. Ironically, within the mainstream, things are done in a much more respectful and civil manner. In New York in 1998, a gallery organized an exhibition of the "blackboard drawings" made by German theosophist Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) in the years 1919–1921. Sixty years after Steiner created his pieces, very similar blackboard drawings were made by German artist Joseph Beuys (1921–1986). Beuys was a faithful follower of Steiner's teachings. It would be surprising if he did not produce his works in full knowledge of Steiner's works. He might even have had philosophical or religious reasons for appropriating them, not only as a point of departure but also as an inspirational repetition. Nevertheless, the terms "similitude" and "connection" were used to describe Beuys's work, whereas the word "derivative" was carefully avoided or, worse, not even considered.

Figure 3.1. Nadín Ospina, *Crítico extático* (*Ecstatic Critic*), 1993, carved stone, 37 × 20 × 17 cm. Courtesy of Nadín Ospina.

In this discussion, the opposite of "derivative" within the mainstream is probably "original." It is another word loaded with ideology. Based on many complex assumptions like free will and outstanding individualism, "original" means a separation from the pack and a form of victory in a competition. Given this heavy ideological burden, it certainly is not a term with universal validity or interest. We have internalized this term so much, especially

in the arts, that to look at it with detachment and understanding is nearly impossible. Nevertheless, I prefer to consider "local unpredictability" instead of "originality" in determining the interest, impact, and influence of a work of art. With this term, I hope to get away from the ideas of individual achievement and market success and come closer to that of cultural articulation.

Any "original" work that managed to make a first breakthrough is important because, in a given context, it had an unpredictable quality. In that same context, a work that is locally derivative because it rehashes something already known by its audience is not unpredictable but redundant and trivial. The process of appropriation and recycling often facilitates the quality of unpredictability in new localities. The difference from its origin adds a choice of mixtures and contexts. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez described the reaction of the people of Macondo on seeing a block of ice for the first time. The feeling of magic was underlined as the primary and persuasive experience. A technologically advanced culture could disregard this encounter as a sign of ignorance and primitiveness, but such an interpretation would be a clear symptom of deafness, not of superiority.

Mistakes, however, can also be made in the opposite direction. Over the years, a backlash likes to portray cubism as derived from African art. There is a nice, but fleeting, feeling of triumph in this revision. But by literally sticking to this view, we don't see that the triumph only shows that we are continuing to follow the same hegemonic rules. If we weren't obsessed with losing and trying to win, we would appreciate the appropriation that took place and the recycling of devices that was used. As with the people of Macondo and the lump of ice, European artists were rightfully dazzled by African art. They put the ideas it contained to work in their local context and gave it a different meaning. It is here where the quality of unpredictability occurred and contributed to Europe's culture in that particular moment.

The interest in unpredictability brings me to another term: "rupture." In the aesthetic development of Western cultures during the twentieth century, rupture has been accepted as something positive, at least when it is applied to art issues. Mainstream conceptualist movements have been both a form of rebellion against, and a consequence of, preceding art movements, and that earned them a rightful place in the corresponding history. This aspect of rebellion (and therefore rupture) serves to identify the movements from within. As in a fight, the artists suddenly know where or on which side they belong. Seen from outside, the same features in that fight help observers to classify movements. Rupture is also helpful for marketing, since it is equated with originality. That mark of in-

dividuality, if kept within limits of decency and understanding, is always rewarded within a capitalist society.

Rupture within the master narrative of art usually is a formal consequence of whatever art styles came before. Art historically speaking, the qualities that make the rupturing movements a formal consequence of other movements can then be picked up to place the new within a seamless narration. It is the artificial need for an unbroken linear development in the history of art that brings about the compromise between rupture and consequence. A new movement breaks away from the past, presents a new and unexpected paradigm, but, oddly enough, also manages to continue a heritage as an inevitable predictable development. This feat is achieved by rearrangements and the smoothing of categories with strange tools like the labeling of some forms of expression as "protomovements."

The word "protomovement" allows the exclusion of some artists from a group into which they might fit thanks to form or intention for the sole reason that their inclusion might upset some other ideas. For instance, it could upset the date structure of the storytelling. In line with this, both Yoko Ono's *Instruction Paintings*, the earliest of which are from 1961, and some even earlier works by George Brecht are classed as "protoconceptual."[5] It is not completely clear why, but it has been decided that conceptual art started in 1965. Consequently, Ono's and Brecht's work don't fit the narration, and it would be terrible to simply affirm that conceptual art started much earlier. These mental hoops jumped through to accommodate a chauvinistic (i.e., of country or ism) writing of history are further complicated by the presumptuous naiveté that leads to classifying the re-creations of previous work by other artists, made many decades later, as original. Depending on how far removed in time, these re-creations are accepted as a new beginning or politely referred to as *post* or *neo*.

Conceptual art was placed within the limits defined by hegemonic history writing once it was perceived as an art style equal in rank with other isms. In itself, this is not something totally bad, even if it cannot fully account for some of the works (e.g., by Gordon Matta-Clark, Hans Haacke) usually claimed for the movement. The placement brings with it some focus and a form of identity that can generate new artistic thoughts and forms. And when nothing new is generated, the placement at least can validate some existing thoughts and forms with a coherent theory. However, conceptualism, not being a formalist movement, is much broader than conceptual art or any preceding artistic style. It was not simply one more aesthetic movement to be neatly fit into the development of the Euro–North American avant-garde. Conceptualism started in a blurry form, and

much earlier, and it was a huge grid of historical, cultural, political, and economical influences and forces. Metaphorically speaking, different regional roads passed through it at different times and following regional clocks. That is why any search for coincidences using the standard mainstream attempts at a definition of conceptualism is irrelevant, and a comparative study of the many versions of conceptualism seems a much better way of approaching the subject matter.[6]

4 *Conceptual Art and Conceptualism in Latin America*

I will now try to sift through some of the differences I see between mainstream conceptualism, particularly as developed in the United States, and Latin American conceptualism by looking at four areas that, more often than not, are placed in a political context. Thus, even in those areas where common ground exists (dematerialization and textualization), there is still a difference. The four areas are: the function of dematerialization, the role of pedagogy, the use of text, and the literary analogue used as a model for art.

The term "dematerialization" was introduced to the mainstream by North American art critic Lucy Lippard in 1967 and now seems to be permanently welded to conceptualism. It is ambiguous in its meaning, and its use isn't even consistent. In mainstream art history, the term has been the subject of many philosophical speculations, including its impossibility—the case being made that the most elusive projects still need some material support to exist.[1] Even Lippard shows changes over time. In her first statements, the idea of dematerialization in art appears as a response to an excessive dependence on crafts. Three years later, in her prologue to the show 2,972,453 (1970, Buenos Aires), she politicized the concept, pointing out that "social change, radical politics, . . . lack of faith in existing cultural institutions and economic systems, have all affected the emergence of dematerialized art."[2] Today the mainstream views dematerialization as a logical consequence of reductionism. However, to understand Latin American conceptualism, it is important to make a clear differentiation between these two terms.

In the art historical discourse, "dematerialization" has been a way of "reducing" material, which has been part of the formalist reductionism typical of the very early 1960s. Formalism, in turn, generally excludes politics. In the Latin American context, dematerialization was not a consequence of formalist speculation. Instead, it became an expedient vehicle for political expression, useful because of its efficiency, accessibility, and low cost. When reductionist movements have a utopian, political, or metaphysical objective, the message is not carried by the art, but in separate manifestos that try to explain the intentions of the cre-

ators. Manifestos define enemies, sometimes straw men, through which one's own identity can be affirmed at the expense of the target.[3] Messages are avoided in the artwork itself and are therefore placed in a parallel vehicle that permits the artist to be explicit.[4] Many Latin American artists concerned with finding formal equivalents to their political visions without falling into illustration also used this device, often to separate themselves from imported visions or to add political views that could not be expressed formally. Thus, the Uruguayan painter Joaquín Torres-García (1874–1949) wrote extensively to theoretically frame his constructivist paintings within a Latin American tradition, and the Group de Recherche d'Art Visuelle (GRAV) gave political reference to their kinetic installations through elaborate proclamations that would not have been readily visible in their constructions.

Generally, however, those constraints that in the mainstream relegated political expression to manifestos in order to leave the art pure were not as active in Latin America. Although this did not necessarily diminish the quantity of manifestos, it did have some effect on the messages they carried. Manifestos were more typical of literary movements, but when used in art, they were not carefully separated from the artwork. It was acceptable to read art in the context of property ownership, political power, and consumer behavior, and the importance and purity of material support was of secondary concern.

In the cases where dematerialization took place, it was for ideological, practical, and economical reasons. The manifesto was integrated into the making or creating of the object and appeared through it. There is no point in mystifying a low level of material support when it is driven by necessity and not by choice. In fact, in Latin America, dematerialization was explicitly suggested as a strategy in 1966, in an article by the influential Argentinean critic Oscar Masotta, where he wrote: "After pop art we dematerialize."[5] The question of who came up with the term first became an issue of contention in Argentina after the term entered art history's lingo and led to a long elucubration by Roberto Jacoby in the publication *Ramona*.[6] In his book *Conciencia y estructura*, Masotta published his lecture and included a quote from El Lissitsky's text "The Future of the Book," which had been reprinted in the *New Left Review* in 1967. In his essay, El Lissitsky wrote: "The idea that moves the masses today is materialism: however, it is dematerialization that characterizes the times."[7]

The occasion for Masotta's text was Eduardo Costa, Raúl Escari, and Roberto Jacoby's "anti-happening" that same year in Buenos Aires, an action in which Masotta was also involved. It was an event that had not taken place in real life, but had sprung to life in newspaper reports and reviews the same as a real event. It

was the information about the piece that became the piece. Masotta saw this work as a perfect answer to the object-oriented pop art, and, being a prominent theoretician at the time, his ideas had great influence on the art then produced in Argentina. Another work in this vein was organized the same year on the occasion of (and against) the Third Biennial of American Art in Córdoba, Argentina. Artists invited the public to witness a happening that used Gandhi's quote "There is room for everybody in the world" as the title. With the public gathered in the gallery and waiting for something to begin, the artists nailed the door shut from outside. The space was reopened an hour later with the staging of a protest rally against the recent police killing of student leader Santiago Pampillón.[8] A related piece was staged in Rosario, Argentina, in 1968 by Graciela Carnevale in the context of a Cycle of Experimental Art. The public was locked in the gallery space, causing such a scandal that the police prohibited any further exhibition in that venue. Increasingly, there was an attempt to let the message, or the content, exist on its own, without being trapped in material confines.

Figure 4.1. Graciela Carnevale, *El encierro* (*The Confinement*), 1968, Ciclo de Arte Experimental Rosario. Photograph belonging to the digitalized document about the "Grupo de vanguardia de Rosario," collection of contemporary art of the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Rosario, Argentina; donation of Graciela Carnevale, 2004.

The trend toward dematerialization in the United States had a different foundation, and "antimaterialism" may have been a more appropriate word for it. Many of the artists had a fascination with "essential" ideas, with a wish to isolate some core of an idea. Such a search did not have the same resonance on the periphery. Artists who produced conceptual works on the periphery—with the exception of those who limited themselves to mimicking the mainstream—"downgraded" the material vehicle, but without any particular dedication to having it eliminated.

In 1967, or thereabouts, Venezuelan artist Claudio Perna (1938–1997) set up still lifes, then photographed them and named them *Objetos como conceptos*

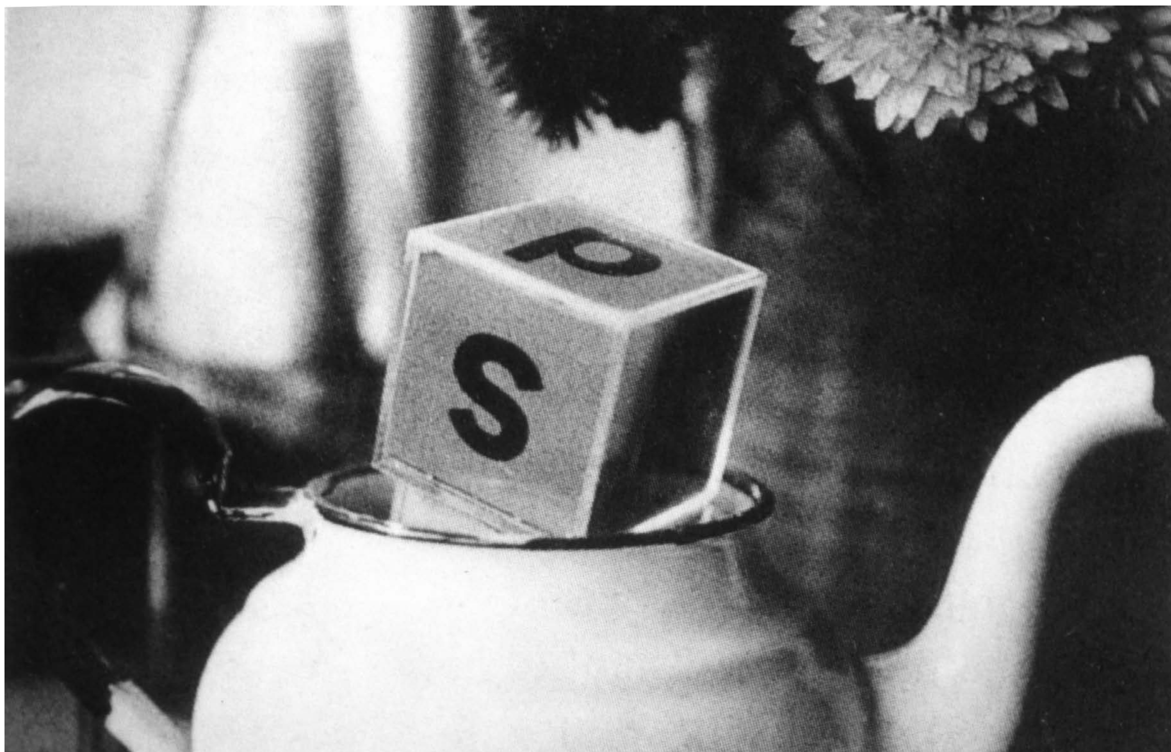


Figure 4.2. Claudio Perna, *Objetos como concepto* (*Objects as Concepts*), ca. 1967, silver print, 20 3 24 cm. Courtesy of Fundación Claudio Perna, Caracas, Venezuela.

(*Objects as Concepts*). From the point of view of mainstream conceptualism, such work was heterodox and lacking in rigor, and Perna would be excluded from any consideration as a contributor to conceptualism. However, if we examine his work carefully, we discover some useful things about conceptualism in Latin America. Perna's work adopted a conceptualist strategy in that he first set up his own readymade and then appropriated it into another context. Therefore it can be said that what Perna did was to determine the importance and value of the visual image literally by what he said in naming it. The text bore the meaning. From the mainstream's point of view, he had an excessive material presence. What he really did was to *recontextualize.*

It is important to note that both directions in conceptualism have a common concern that was never made sufficiently explicit. With hindsight, it is easier to see now that this concern was the erosion of information. In the process of realizing a work of art, there is always a distance between initial conception and final result, something that for the longest time has made me ironize that the history of art is an accumulation of errors. This distance is the first step of the

erosion process. When the work is read, viewed, or in any way consumed, there is a distance between the creator and the receiver. This is the second step in the erosion of information.

In 1969, Argentinean artist David Lamelas (1946–) partially analyzed some of these issues:

> Once we have the idea, the next step is to consider the means required for its materialization. Automatically, everything tends to *disregard* this executive phase that exists between *idea* and the *finished work*. All subsequent reasoning is aimed at concealing this intermediate step, therefore succeeding in producing a work fit for consumption. . . . The resulting "work of art" is thus completed, static and tantamount to itself—an artistic object that will remain forever intact. This is invariably the case, even if those works *change* or comprise *motion*, for what is displayed is the result of an idea transformed into a concrete fact.[9]

While Lamelas applies these ideas to traditional parameters of art and thus speaks of "concealing this intermediate step," what conceptualist artists share is a step beyond. Whether in the orthodox mainstream or on the periphery of conceptualism (and Lamelas himself was an active participator at the time), the concern is to minimize the erosion, not to hide it. Hiding leads to finding forms of packaging. In conceptualist work, the task is usually about revealing the intermediate step, hence so-called process art, which is one form of avoiding erosion. The real search was for something we can call (if we like jargon-fitting neologisms) "demediatization," a way of conveying everything to the viewer.

In terms of communication, conceptualism wanted to find ways to send messages through no-loss information systems. Theory of information, as presented by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver, among others, was as important and influential to the artists both on the periphery and in the mainstream of the sixties as was semiotics and structuralism. Obviously, the diminution of the material presence was of great help in this. When considered in relation to ideas, material is something rather crude and rough. If one then adds the clumsiness provided by a craft, the distance between what the artists wants and what the viewer gets becomes quite notable.[10] In the search for ways to reduce the loss of information (*demediatization*), using context to give meaning (*contextualization*) appears to be a subtler tool than reducing material (*reductionism*).

In both mainstream and Latin American conceptualism, there was a very heavy emphasis on theoretical speculation. In some cases, artists were compelled to leave enormous amounts of documentation, too often unreadable or unbear-

ably boring. This outpouring was partly demanded by the need to explain and justify the nature of the rupture their work was supposedly producing, but it also served to explain things that were not that self-explanatory because of the lack of material presence. At the time, nonmaterial work seemed to have a smaller chance of staying in the historical record, so many artists felt the need to use their explanatory writing to make sure that they got registered. In later stages, in the United States and England, that theorization in text form slowly crept into the art itself and became one with the production of art. In an extreme tautology, the theory of the work of art became the work of art. In Latin America, artists theorized less about art than about politics, so it was politics that slowly crept into the production of art and became one with art. In 1968, Argentinean artist Pablo Suárez wrote a letter politically reasoning his refusal to participate in an exhibition and then, in turn, declared his letter to be his contribution to the show.[11]

The merger of politics and art not only gave identity and purpose to the role of art in society but also served as a strategy to effect change. It is primarily on this level where didactics entered conceptualist art in Latin America.

”Didactics” is generally considered a dirty word in the art shown by high-culture galleries. It is the primacy of formalism and the promotion of *art for art's sake* as a symbol for individualistic freedom that led to a very simplistic definition of didactics and to its blacklisting. In formalism's dismissive definition of "didacticism," explicit messages are viewed as *dumbed down*, a move that was considered unacceptable for any self-respecting gatekeeper of the arts.[12] But besides adopting a patronizing attitude toward the viewer, because of this primacy of formalism, the term "didactic art" is also intended to evoke negative things like propaganda, authoritarian manipulations, and totalitarianism. It is equated with indoctrinating simplifications. This snobbery, however, hides the fact that didactic qualities are unavoidable when one deals with any form of purposeful communication, regardless if one is in the center or on the periphery. The real question to be discussed is not so much the importance of avoiding didactic intent, but rather how effectively the intention is veiled. By definition, any form of art is manipulative, and the refusal to assume responsibility for this fact is disingenuous.

It is no accident that the written word occupied a disproportionate presence in the conceptualist art of both the mainstream and Latin America. Rightly or wrongly, text seemed a much more direct way of communicating an idea with clarity than any form of rendering. In the world of ideas, rendering always had the danger of appearing to be a servant to text and thus becoming an illustration. Text also seemed to be potentially less ambiguous and, therefore, short of telepathy, more accurate and less subject to erosion of information. Not only was text

overwhelmingly present, but, thanks to Ferdinand de Saussure, it also became a structural model for the work. Everything became a form of language and thus, ironically, the polysemous quality of visuality was somewhat preserved. Text was a metaphor from which one drew conclusions for the shaping of the piece, no matter the degree of dematerialization. And suddenly text wasn't enough and subtext came into the picture as well. However, it wasn't the presence of text that determined differences between the mainstream and Latin America, but rather the manner in which it was used in each case.

Shortly after both de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss (semiotics and structuralism, respectively) became fashionable in the United States, it struck artists that visual art consists of signs and therefore can be "read."[13] It soon followed that textual analysis merged with the work repeated itself, and, subsequently, the analysis was allowed to become the work.

In Latin America, where close ties with French culture and language had existed since the late nineteenth century when positivism was in vogue, all this became clear earlier. By the time structuralism reached prominence in the United States, it had already existed for many years in the broader Latin American intellectual public domain. Thus (as in Europe with lettrism), the interest in text preceded minimalism, whereas in the United States the reverse occurred. Paradoxically, when minimalism was used as a formal device, it was done as an applied form.

In Brazil, much of concretism in visual arts was a consequence of concrete poetry, and the theoretical writings of some poets, particularly those of (José Ribamar) Ferreira Gullar (1930–), prefigured minimalist reasoning. When Mathias Goeritz (Mexico, 1915–1990) used his version of minimalism, it was not self-referential, but mystical in purpose. In Argentina, speculations about information, meaning, and representation during 1965–1966 preceded the relatively late appearance of Argentinean minimalism (the Estructuras Primarias II exhibition in Buenos Aires took place in 1967).[14] Already during the 1930s, Argentinean painter Xul Solar (1887–1963), a close friend of writer Jorge Luis Borges, created a linguistic structure into which he wanted to merge all of his art.

In the United States, the fact that the interest in reading signs took place shortly after minimalism came on the scene meant that reading signs became part of the same project. Analysis of language in art was tautological (as in Kosuth's, some of Ed Ruscha's, and Larry Weiner's work). In Latin America, because the interest in *text* preceded minimalism, there was no pressure for a connection with that project. Text was open to many other possibilities, free to become a vehicle for other ideas within the art context.

The use of language in visual art forced the Latin American artist to make a choice. Those artists who were addressing the international market did not hesitate to use English for their works, no matter where they were living.[15] Some chose English not out of an expectation to sell, but rather to develop an international audience for what they had to say. Others pursued their interest in language to rediscover the subject of communication with a local audience. That raised the issue of priorities in regard to local versus external audiences. For those of us in diaspora or exile, the issues became even trickier. In my own case, thinking of Uruguay and living in New York, I remember being painfully torn. I didn't know what language to use, and I often made the same piece twice, only to then ponder about whether, legally speaking, this constituted an edition of two or if I had made two originals.

Besides the above considerations, there is yet another area of difference between conceptualism in the mainstream and in Latin America, and it is closely related to the role of text and the use of literary analogues to advance the understanding of art. In writing about the visual arts in the mainstream and the literary values and analogues used in art criticism, Joshua Taylor noted that over the last couple of centuries, these have shifted between history, poetry, psychology, and metaphysics.[16] Taylor is not interested in the narrative content of the analogue, but rather in the way literature as text is used as a model. For example, he notes that by the end of the nineteenth century, "much critical writing on art was a form of poetizing. To describe a painting one had to be taken into its spell and write within its special poetic aura." [17] It is evident that the analogue of poetry appeared at the same time in the mainstream and in Latin America. However, it continued much longer in Latin America and supported a not very rigorous and quite sentimental school of cultural and sociological ideas well into the 1950s.

Taylor's analysis, while useful, falls short by at least two categories: politics and philosophy of art.[18] The political reading of the work helps us to understand the political impact and relevance in the Latin American arena. Philosophy of art, meanwhile, seems to be the vehicle with which to read mainstream conceptualism.

6 *The Tupamaros*

The Uruguayan guerrilla group known as the Tupamaros certainly meddled more directly in reality and everyday life than Simón Rodríguez, but then again, it was this meddling that actually defined them. If there is a line that separates art from politics, there are two events in Latin America that touch this line from their separate areas. The Tupamaros exemplify politics coming as close as possible to the art side of the line. Some years later, in 1968, the Argentinean group Tucumán Arde (Tucumán Is Burning) is an example of art coming as close as possible to the political side of the line. Yet, it should be clearly stated that the Tupamaros never declared themselves to be artists or as doing art. They were clearly a guerrilla movement, albeit an idiosyncratic one. By analyzing their actions as an aesthetic phenomenon, and therefore minimizing the unpleasantries of day-to-day guerrilla warfare, there is the danger of excessive romanticizing (in their time they were often characterized as "Robin Hoods" by the foreign press) and of a historical distortion of events.

The Tupamaros started to organize during 1962, but it was two years before they identified themselves by that name.[1] Also known as the MLN (Movimiento de Liberación Nacional), the group was started by people from different political sectors, but mostly by members of the Socialist Party and dissidents of the Anarchist Federation.[2] The organization also drew heavy support from the student population, and though there were art students among them, the Tupamaros did not develop overt artistic ambitions. Their main role was to become the "people's prosecutors" and, as such, to uncover corruption in the government, banks, and industry. Uruguay had been, until then, a model of stability in Latin America. However, the agricultural production that had provided the country's wealth until the Korean War had not updated its methods and had become noncompetitive. The economy suffered, and the oligarchy was unwilling to share its wealth in order to keep the progressive social system functioning. What had been a primarily middle-class society became increasingly polarized. The crisis started to become visible during the beginning of the decade of the sixties with an enormous strengthening of the police.

Figure 6.1. *Bala* (*Bullet*), 1969, graffiti on the wall of the University of Uruguay pointing out bullet holes. Photo Luis Camnitzer.

The movement originated as a voice against all of the above, but also as a reaction to the activities of right-wing gangs that were acting under the protection of the police. Starting in 1960, these gangs terrorized left-wing militants through kidnapping, scarring bodies with swastikas drawn with razor blades, and occasional murders. One of the deaths, that of high school teacher Arbelio Ramírez, was particularly poignant.

It is presumed that the bullets that killed Ramírez were actually intended for Che Guevara, who, on August 17, 1961, was giving a lecture at the university. The bullets missed Che and hit Ramírez instead.[3] It was ironic that in his remarks that day, Che had gone to great pains to explain why one should not use weapons when legal options are still available.[4]

The group started organizing shortly after this incident, but only became public in 1967, with the publication of an "Open Letter to the Police" in one of the daily newspapers. In it they stated:

> . . . For these reasons we place ourselves outside the law. This is the only honest solution when the law is not applied equally, when the law exists to defend the false interests of a minority in detriment of the majority, when the law functions against the progress of the country, when even those who created the law depart from it with impunity whenever it is convenient for them.[5]

At the time, Uruguay was a country with roughly three million inhabitants, half of whom lived in Montevideo, the capital. The ensuing urban culture that marked the country led the Tupamaros to operate primarily in an urban environment, something that had no precedent for successful guerrilla activity. Moving constantly in densely populated areas led them to develop a strategy that would not only avoid alienating the public but would also make them instantly attractive and persuasive in the eyes of the people.[6] The axiomatic quality they gave to these ideas separates the Tupamaros from most of the other Latin American guerrilla movements. In 1969, for example, Brazilian guerrilla leader Carlos Marighela proclaimed rather bluntly:

> The urban guerrilla's reason for existence, the basic condition in which he acts and survives, is to shoot.[7]

In this schema, according to Marighela, guerrillas are distinguishable from outlaws because they eschew personal gain, and the public is expected to see and understand this difference between revolutionary heroes and exploiters.

Given the particular situation of Uruguay within the Latin American context, schematic positions of this kind were of no use to the Tupamaros. They were keenly aware that no blood had flowed in Uruguay since 1904, and they believed that the fight now required was a bloodless one, since Uruguay was a country whose population took pride in a long tradition of civility. For both practical and ideological reasons, they believed this was the only way to move the public to support their cause. Although this policy unfortunately was not sustained during the life of the movement, it certainly informed its beginnings. To this effect, the Tupamaros, unlike many other guerrilla movements, ignored the use of "focalized" war violence (Che Guevara's term) to generate wildfire opposition to the system. Instead, they resorted to a pedagogical process of image building. During its earlier stages, the movement had notably passed on several opportunities to kill high-ranking enemies.[8] The humane character of their operations was designed not only to elicit sympathy but also, it was hoped, to elicit, promote, and encourage collaboration from the public. Their operations were scrupulously or-

Figure 6.2. Tupamaros, *Subversión, Las Fuerzas Armadas al Pueblo Oriental* (Subversion, The Armed Forces to the Oriental People), 1971, blueprint for an operation at the Coca-Cola plant in Montevideo, Uruguay.

ganized, and they often had a medical doctor on hand to take care of any persons, whether friend or enemy, who might be harmed if violence broke out.

Among the things the Tupamaros sought to achieve with their operations was a lasting effect on the memory of the public. They wanted the public to see beyond any functional results of a given operation and to build something less tangible but more powerful in the long run: a mythical image. Publicity and communication, their primary goals, governed and hybridized all other actions. In one of their strategy papers, they spoke of "armed propaganda" and noted that it

> becomes particularly important under certain conditions, like becoming [publicly] known in the beginning of the guerrilla's development. It also is important in the moment of clarifying positions toward the people during those periods in which drastic measures have to be taken that do not

> clearly illustrate the guerrilla's aims and that might be difficult for the popular mind to comprehend.[9]

Some years later, in 1977, the armed forces published a self-promoting book in which they evaluated this strategy with unexpected and surprising objectivity:

> Surrounded by great publicity, these actions try to present the methods of the Police and the Government as clumsy and inefficient, so that the organization may appear, [while] ridiculing them, installed on the cusp of imagination and ingenuity.[10]

The general theory of the Tupamaros was that "it is the revolutionary actions that lead to revolutionary situations." It was premised on a completely different understanding than that of the traditional "*foco*," or spark action, employed by other militant groups.[11] Analyzing the movement in relation to other Latin American guerrilla groups, French writer Régis Debray pointed out the absence of any prejudgments in the organization. In his comments, he sounds as if he is describing creation rather than strategy:

> 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.[12]

Debray's comment reminds me of Richard Huelsenbeck's introduction to the *Dada Almanach:*

> The dadaist is the freest man on Earth. An ideologue is every man who falls for the lie presented by his own intellect: that an idea, that is, the symbol for an instant of perceived reality, is absolutely real.[13]

Debray's admiration is particularly remarkable, because the Tupamaros had acted against his own wisdom as expressed in his *Revolution in the Revolution?* where he had written that

> armed propaganda follows military action but does not precede it. Armed propaganda has more to do with the internal than with the external guerrilla front. The main point is that under present conditions the most important form of propaganda is successful military actions.[14]

With his statement, Debray had endorsed the traditional strategy of hit-run-and-hope-for-wildfire, a position shared by most of the other guerrilla movements. Marighela, for example, discussed armed propaganda as "the coordination of

urban guerrilla actions, including each armed action."[15] The assumption was that the accent had to be on "armed," based on the aura this word had thanks to the success of the Cuban Revolution. The Tupamaros, more deeply rooted in the student movement and in intellectual circles, shifted the accent to "propaganda."

It was the design of the operations that stood out and that led observers like Régis Debray to refer to the Tupamaros as a "cultural phenomenon."[16] It prompted descriptions of their use of time and timing more likely to be found in discussions about filmmaking.[17]

The Tupamaro leadership clearly wished to affect the media, but they didn't theorize about it, and to some extent were not self-conscious about this aspect of their actions. In response to a question I asked him, one leader of the movement, years later, speculated that there probably were two factors that influenced their use of "creativity." One was a deep distrust of all stereotypes, a distrust that led them to break from traditional political groups in the first place. The other was the hard fact that most of the leaders of the movement were taken off to prison before the movement had a chance to plan any major operations. During their imprisonment, they befriended many of the nonpolitical prisoners and discovered unusually creative thinking and resourcefulness among them. These insights were translated into political methods once they broke out of jail, and led to one of their most famous capers, the "Operación Pando," discussed below.[18]

Operations generally were conceived of as "theater" and planned accordingly. Every "player" or "actor" rehearsed not only his/her own role but also that of somebody else as well, so there was always an understudy prepared to take over if events took an unexpected turn.[19]

The first couple of events organized by the Tupamaros did not at all qualify for aesthetic consideration. They consisted of plain money-and-arms gathering through simple break-ins. One of these actions led to the jailing of Julio Marenales, the fired sculpture teacher I referred to in Chapter 1. When interrogated by police after being caught, he simply told the truth, that he had held up a bank not for personal gain but to finance revolution. The idea seemed so far fetched that he was suspected of insanity and set free three months later.[20]

Over the years, the Tupamaros were able to seriously improve their bank-robbing operations. Between September and November of 1968, they took money thirteen times. One of the banks was successfully targeted twice in the span of two weeks. But the more interesting operations were not directly bank related.

In 1963, the group engineered its first major plot involving food distribution. Guerrillas posed as members of a neighborhood political club and ordered a

truckload of goods from a major food supplier. Given the proximity of Christmas, they made sure that a large supply of sweets was included in the shipment. The truck was directed to an address close to a shantytown and then was kidnapped upon arrival. The food was then distributed among the local people. Though the operation was successful, the Tupamaros did not develop this format into a general tactic. They decided that the actual help provided to the people did not justify the risks taken and was not commensurate with the investment of time and energy by the guerrilla movement. [21]

The Tupamaros also resorted to such debatable actions as kidnapping, although this was mostly for interrogation and sometimes also to embarrass the government. They had a "People's Jail" for this purpose, from which the prisoners were released as soon as it was deemed feasible. One exception to this policy was the case of Dan Mitrione. Mitrione was a former chief of police in the United States who had been sent to Montevideo to instruct police personnel in torture techniques. Caught by the Tupamaros, he was imprisoned, and his possible release was used to negotiate the freedom of jailed guerrilla members. The discussions went well until the last moment, when the government pulled back from any deal. The guerrilla cell that held Mitrione and had threatened to execute him if the negotiations fell through kept their promise against the better judgment of the majority of the movement. Although there was no question about the criminal status of Mitrione, the execution, in August of 1971, seriously damaged the image of the whole movement.[22] Subsequently, other acts of violence more typical of armed warfare followed and further tarnished the early image of the movement.

Meanwhile, during the same period, 106 prisoners died in government jails. According to regulations, prisoners in government jails

> may not have books with underlined text or handwritten comments. May not have books of Marxist ideology or related tendencies or other forbidden topics. . . . It is forbidden to produce crafts containing tendentious drawings such as: a rose, a bleeding rose, the Aztec sun, a five-pointed star, a dove, a fist, hands united to make the shape of doves, a mosquito, a fish, a pyramid, a couple, a woman with child, a pregnant woman. One may not make standardized crafts that may be identified as made in the Establishment.[23]

Punishment for any infraction was solitary confinement.

It should be said that the Tupamaros used no torture with their prisoners; they offered qualified medical service when needed, and interrogation—when used—

was generally polite. In one of their operations during 1971, the Tupamaros kidnapped both the director of the Public Energy Department and a former minister of agriculture and held them in the People's Jail for a whole year. For the director, it was actually a second experience. Ulysses Pereira Reverbel, a very unpopular character accused of being profoundly and irredeemably corrupt, had been taken in once before, in 1969.[24] Claude Fly, an American Agency for International Development (AID) adviser, spent seven months (August 7, 1970, to February 27, 1971) imprisoned in the People's Jail. After his release, he refused to give any information to the police and maintained friendly correspondence with some of his captors. It was a relation that cannot be easily dismissed or explained as a case of Stockholm syndrome.[25]

During that same year (1971) and for short periods, the Tupamaros also took over movie houses and used the captive attention of the public to project slides in which they showed the prisoners and their well-being, added to slogans about the movement.

Both the Tupamaros' initial emphasis on bloodlessness and the conditions provided by the urban environment as a theatrical stage may have unconsciously led them into this aestheticization of operations. And although they were armed and increasingly subdivided into autonomous cells that took part in military encounters that sometimes produced unnecessary and unjustified casualties, by the time they ceased their underground operations, the total body count was relatively small. Over the period of eleven years in which the Tupamaros were active in the underground, their operations led to the death of forty-nine guerrillas and fifty army and police members.[26]

The year 1969 proved the most fertile in actions with a spectacular staging and aesthetic appeal. During that year, the movement performed eleven highly publicized operations and eighty others that lacked publicity. Even if not all the operations were a media success, the sophistication of the use of propaganda kept increasing, and it is clear that the Tupamaros had chosen to give this primacy. The military component in the operations worked only as a supporting instrument, flying in the face of favorite models like the Cuban and Vietnamese experiences. And years earlier, Fidel Castro had expressed his condemnation of any urban-based guerrilla movement when he proclaimed that the city was "a cemetery of revolutionaries and resources."[27]

On January 1, 1969, while a trial was in process against the Tupamaros, members of the movement entered the rooms of the district court and reclaimed forty-one weapons. The weapons had been found earlier by police in a Tupamaro hiding place and were kept in storage in the court building. On February 7, some

A LA INJUSTICIA DEL REGIMEN
SE OPONE LA JUSTICIA DEL PUEBLO

Frick Davies y Ulysses Pereira Reverbel,
detenidos en la Cárcel del Pueblo

Hemos ganado una batalla
pero no la guerra ★★★★★

Por la libertad de todos
los presos politicos ★★★★★

Habrá patria para todos o
no habrá patria para nadie

Figure 6.3. (left) Tupamaros, *Subversión, Las Fuerzas Armadas al Pueblo Oriental,* 1971, slides for movie theaters.

Figure 6.4. Tupamaros, *Cloaca minada* (Mined Sewer), 1972, sign left to disconcert the police during an escape through a specially dug tunnel, news clipping.

Tupamaros deposited a package with 220 pounds of explosive gelignite in front of the house of an army official known to be a bomb expert. The material was initially taken from an army depot, but the group decided later that it was too dangerous for the use they had in mind. They returned the package with a note containing detailed explanations about how and why. On February 19, dressed as policemen, they took the equivalent of 220,000 dollars, which was an enormous amount of money for Uruguay at the time, from the Casino San Rafael in Punta del Este. San Rafael is the fanciest state-owned gambling house in the country. Too late, they realized that the money taken included the tips for the employees. The Tupamaros immediately offered (unsuccessfully) to return the corresponding percentage. On May 15, they took over a major radio station during the broadcast of an important international soccer game. With most of the population of the country listening, they read a political message six times over the next half hour. On July 16, a faction called the OPR 33 stole the original flag used by a group of thirty-three patriots who had entered Uruguay in 1825 to free the country from Spain. The flag was on permanent display in the Museum of National History. After the national flag, this one is ranked second as a civic symbol. On it is an inscription proclaiming "Freedom or Death." In a public an-

nouncement, they promised to return the flag to the museum once the political situation deserved it. At the time of this writing, it has yet to be returned.[28] On December 30, 1969, a box was left on the grounds of the Feria de Libros y Grabados (Book and Print Fair), a very public and popular event that takes place once a year. At that time, the fair was held in the front plaza of the municipality building. Activated by clockwork and to the delight of most of the public, the box broke open and started spouting propaganda leaflets into the crowd.[29]

The most elaborate and spectacular of the public events performed by the Tupamaros was "Operación Pando," and it involved about one hundred guerrilla members. On October 8, pointedly coinciding with the second anniversary of Che's death, they hired cars for a funeral procession. The excuse given for the occasion was the reburial of a relative who had died in Argentina several years earlier. The entourage included five cars and a van. The reburial was to take place in Pando, a city of twenty thousand people about twenty-five miles from Montevideo. On its way, the procession stopped at several points to pick up more "relatives," all of whom bore an appropriately funereal demeanor, most of them crying. The coffin was full of arms intended for the operation. Once the group was assembled, they overpowered the hired drivers and the real work started. What followed included the takeover of the police headquarters, the fire station, the telephone building, and, finally, the four banks in town.

From a practical point of view, the operation was a big failure. During the return to Montevideo, a confrontation with police took place, and three guerrillas died and eighteen were arrested.[30] However, from an aesthetic point of view, especially with regard to the narration of the sequence of preparations—the takeover of each station constitutes a complex subplot—the operation was a memorable achievement. It set the tone for further theatrical staging of events for which the city and its inhabitants played a role in the script designed by the guerrilla "actors."[31]

The Tupamaros may not have had aesthetic ambitions, but they certainly were eager to establish a good and efficient communication system. To achieve this, one would presume that they needed some kind of iconography, but they didn't use any, at least not in the form of literally illustrative images about the movement or their cause. Unlike the case of many other guerrilla movements, the publications by the Tupamaros were mostly without pictures. They were also dry and boring. Their effort was invested in the public relations image they projected. This projection required the use of mass media, and it is here where some actions by Latin American conceptualists, U.S. Yippies, and the U.S. war resistance movement may come to mind. However, while the U.S. examples

catered to the media format, the Tupamaro operations did not. Or, if they did, it was in a much-reduced form.

With their own mobile radio station and print shop, and the occasional takeover of public airwaves, the Tupamaros were relatively independent and immune to any manipulation of their image. The feat mentioned earlier, the use of a popular radio station to beam their messages during a soccer game, did more for the Tupamaro image than the actual content of their proclamation. The design of their operations did not have to be compromised by unfriendly "mediation." Instead, the operations made use of a very direct and sympathetic rumor mill that exploited the mechanisms of folklore more than those of advertising.[32]

With all these actions, the movement became successful enough to provoke the government (in 1970) into officially prohibiting the use of six words (or terms) in the press. "Extremist cells," "commandos," "political delinquents," "ideological delinquent," "subversive," and "terrorist" could not be printed by any newspaper in the country. The government issued a list of permissible words to be used in their place, among which were "evildoer," "delinquent," "criminal," and "offender."

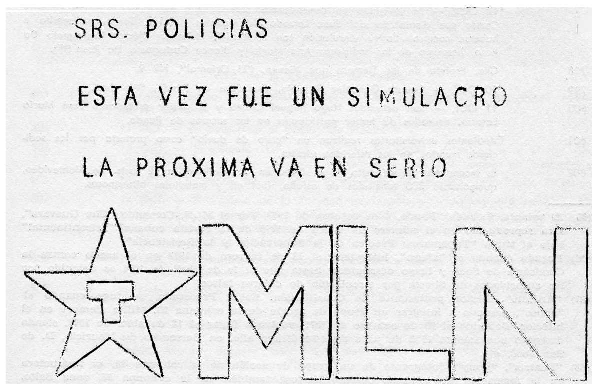
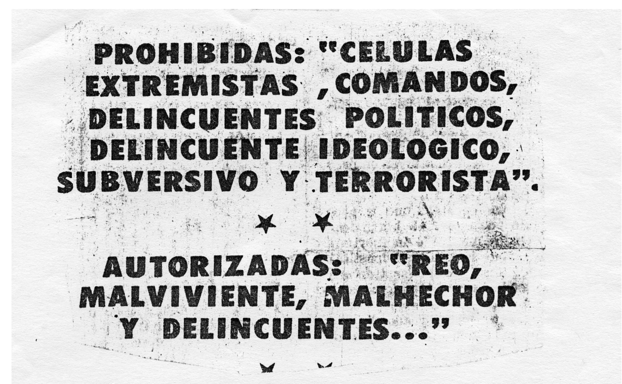


Figure 6.5. Tupamaros, "Messrs. Policemen, This time it was a simulation; the next time it will be for real," 1969. Mimeographed flyer, collection of Luis Camnitzer.


PROHIBIDAS: "CELULAS EXTREMISTAS, COMANDOS, DELINCUENTES POLITICOS, DELINCUENTE IDEOLOGICO, SUBVERSIVO Y TERRORISTA".

AUTORIZADAS: "REO, MALVIVIENTE, MALHECHOR Y DELINCUENTES..."

Figure 6.6. Uruguayan government's six prohibited words, 1970 news clipping, Montevideo, Uruguay.

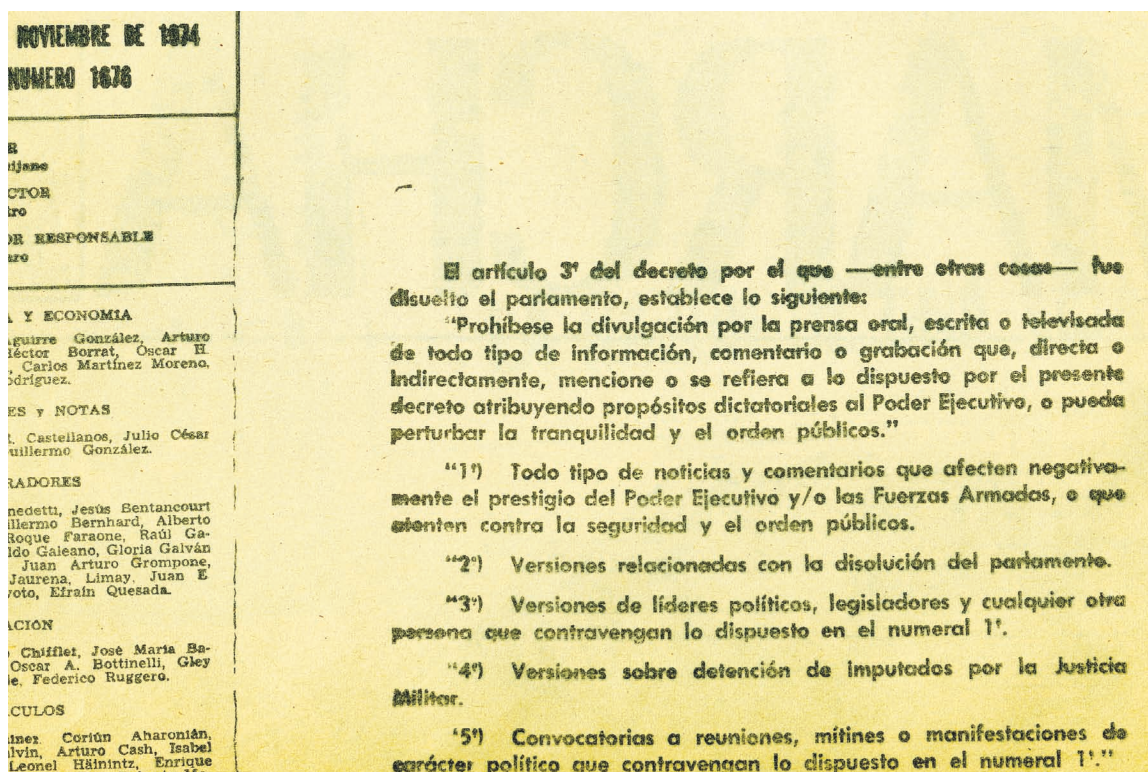
This step was followed by further and unprecedented acts of censorship. Even the "*murgas*," the popular groups that perform during the Carnival season on open stages in the different neighborhoods of Montevideo, felt the repression. Their songs are always topical, and they humorously and critically refer in their lyrics to events of the previous year. In one incident, the word "captain" had to be taken out of a reference to *Peter Pan*'s Captain Hook, since the context was

deemed offensive to the armed forces.[33] Temporarily, the war had shifted to the field of language. It was something of an orthodox conceptualist dream.

During April of 1972, the Ministries of Defense and the Interior joined in issuing a declaration in which they not only reasserted that the use of public force was a prerogative of the executive branch of the government, but they also rejected "any private organization that presumed to usurp any competencies of the State." What amounted to a government's recognition of its own weakness was embellished the following year, when the government/army climaxed with an oxymoron of classic proportions. In the same decree in which the Parliament was abolished and dictatorship was officially instituted (1973), it was declared that

> it is forbidden to divulge . . . any type of information . . . that directly or indirectly attributes dictatorial intentions to the Executive Power because of the present decree. . . ."[34]

By then, the Tupamaros had already been defeated (the army coup was not connected with any ongoing warfare), but there were other and more immediate reasons than those predicted by the skeptics that led to their demise. One was



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A Y ECONOMIA
guirre González, Arturo Héctor Borrat, Óscar H. , Carlos Martínez Moreno, odríguez.

ES y NOTAS
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RADORES
nedetti, Jesús Bentancourt illermo Bernhard, Alberto Roque Faraone, Raúl Galdo Galeano, Gloria Galván Juan Arturo Grompone, Jaurena, Limay, Juan E voto, Efraín Quesada.

ACION
Chifflet, José María Ba- Oscar A. Bottinelli, Gley le, Federico Ruggero.

CULOS
inez. Coriún Aharonián, lvin, Arturo Cash, Isabel Leonel Häinintz, Enrique

El artículo 3º del decreto por el que —entre otras cosas— fue disuelto el parlamento, establece lo siguiente:

"Prohíbese la divulgación por la prensa oral, escrita o televisada de todo tipo de información, comentario o grabación que, directa o indirectamente, mencione o se refiera a lo dispuesto por el presente decreto atribuyendo propósitos dictatoriales al Poder Ejecutivo, o pueda perturbar la tranquilidad y el orden públicos."

"1º) Todo tipo de noticias y comentarios que afecten negativamente el prestigio del Poder Ejecutivo y/o las Fuerzas Armadas, o que atenten contra la seguridad y el orden públicos.

"2º) Versiones relacionadas con la disolución del parlamento.

"3º) Versiones de líderes políticos, legisladores y cualquier otra persona que contravengan lo dispuesto en el numeral 1º.

"4º) Versiones sobre detención de imputados por la Justicia Militar.

'5º) Convocatorias a reuniones, mítines o manifestaciones de carácter político que contravengan lo dispuesto en el numeral 1º."

Figure 6.7. Army communiqué, 1974 *Marcha* news clipping, Montevideo, Uruguay.

the excessive and rapid growth in their ranks. The result of their success in affecting public opinion proved fatal once this combined with a lack of appropriate screening systems. What had started as a relatively unified strategy became a fragmented one, with units taking it upon themselves to engage in unneeded violence. Another factor, although linked with the first one, was enemy infiltration in the higher ranks. The third cause was a general improvement of the Uruguayan intelligence service, including a remarkable sophistication in the use of torture, which was being aided by heavy U.S. financial support, as well as by technical training through "advisors." Finally, an increase in internal dissention caused lateral defections, secessions from the movement on strategic grounds that, although not based on ideological discrepancies, weakened the movement's overall structure.

In 1984, after the withdrawal of U.S. support, the army abandoned its support of the government and allowed for the reinstitution of democracy. As of 1985, the Tupamaros are organized as a legal party and have members in the Uruguayan Senate, the Chamber of Deputies, and the City Council of Montevideo. Their main function for the moment is to be ombudsmen.

• • • • • •

The Tupamaros developed, if one were to use artistic terms, a new form of theater. To accommodate what he called "environmental theater," U.S. critic Richard Schechner offered a diagram that goes from public events (demonstrations), to intermedia (happenings), to environmental theater, ending in traditional theater.[35] The range went from "impure" (life) to "pure" (art). The Tupamaro operations subverted this diagram because they were nearly as rigidly structured as traditional theater, but functioned under unpredictable conditions. Therefore, one would presume a need for total improvisation.

In this context, one remarkable feature of the Tupamaro operations was their utilization of time. In our modern culture, time has acquired a sacred status that rules how we look at things as much as it controls the rest of our lives. A work of art usually requests our time for contemplation in a polite manner, and the spectator grants it at his or her own discretion. We can leave whenever we want to. Part of the subversion instituted by the Tupamaros relied on the fact that they completely appropriated the viewer's time, either as a witness or through direct involvement. One could not leave whenever one wanted to. They also managed to take over time under nonmatrixed conditions, that is, uncontrolled by constraints of space or structure.[36] They were able to force decisions after the fact,

decisions that ranged from sympathy/antipathy, to the need for change or lack thereof, to just evaluating the success or failure of an operation. That is, there were conditions that, although not pegged to traditional patterns of consumption, could not be ignored. This way of dealing with time is usually reserved for disciplinary actions by armies and governments (whether democratic or regimented), including schooling and jailing. In fact, several years later, Nicos Poulantzas described the capitalist state in relation to time and space, a description that actually applies to any state structure with a central government:

> What is specific to the capitalist state is that it absorbs social time and space, sets up the matrices of time and space, and monopolizes the organization of time and space that become, by the action of the state, networks of domination and power.[37]

Poulantzas's description complements what Anthony Giddens wrote during the same period about the nation-state and its claimed monopoly of violence:

> The nation-state, which exists in a complex of other nation-states, is a set of institutional forms of governance, maintaining an administrative monopoly over a territory with demarcated boundaries (borders), its rule being sanctioned by law, and direct control of the means of internal and external violence . . . only in modern nation-states can the state apparatus generally lay successful claim to the monopoly of the means of violence, and only in such states does the administrative scope of the state apparatus correspond directly with territorial boundaries about which that claim is made.[38]

Political-military rebellions usually address the issue of enemy power in a straightforward manner and try to change the balance of power to their own advantage. In doing so, they justify their actions by invoking the monopoly and misuse of the administration of violence. Since the field of art concerns itself with changes in the representations of time and space, it is expected that artists have the clearest ability to subvert the monopoly of the state. It is here where the Tupamaros unwittingly come close to art.

The line separating liberating activities from crime, always blurred by changing definitions of legality, was even more confusing under dictatorship. It became, then, even more urgently a subject of attention for the artist and for the creative fighter.[39] What words were allowed, what was offensive to state and armies, what constituted a "crowd"—all were unpredictable variables that changed almost daily. Art therefore became a tool for liberation, and an even

more suspicious activity under authoritarian regimes. This increased the temptation of many artists to seek subversion through art, to flirt with political illicitness, and, sometimes, even to go underground.

It could be said that the attacks of the Tupamaros, with a sizable anarchic component in their outlook, were reactions against the misuse of overdetermination more than against ideology.[40] By broadening the scope of actions in this artistic direction, the Tupamaros departed from the traditional realm of military guerrilla movements and came closer to something that can be called active aesthetics. There is some parallel to ideas espoused by situationism in as much as there was a revelation of how capitalism organizes time, but unlike the situationists, the Tupamaros' focus was on the appropriation of time rather than on the relation between leisure and exploitation.

Audiences captive against their will generally don't like their predicament. They express resentment, regardless of whether iron bars or school desks formalize the captivity. It was amazing that in the case of the Tupamaros the appropriation of the public's time elicited sympathy and not resentment. It was a further indication that their actions did strike responsive chords other than ones of ideological agreement (which they often did not).

Parallel U.S. experiences were different in the sense that, with the advantage of a less repressive environment, the actions were designed to be seen on the television screen. For example, in the November 13, 1969, "March against Death" to the Arlington National Cemetery, the demonstrators carried black balloons to symbolize the casualties of war. They created a spectacle that could only be perceived by those who were outside the rally, but not by the participants. The public, as in many other similar events, was not intended to be on-site. Anybody present was marching; the onlookers were home in front of the TV watching the news. The public here was ultimately defined by the consumption of the spectacle.[41] In Uruguay, a much less media-dependent society, the Tupamaros hoped to have the public join the events.

The most structured operations performed by the Tupamaros fit somewhere between "happenings" and mass media events. Both the immediately perceivable activity and its "memory" recorded by the media (or by the popular rumor mill) ultimately led to a revolutionary folklore wherein the goal was not to make artistic information a sociological issue or to anesthetize politics, but to create political awareness.

The introduction of aesthetics into politics has its dangers, since it can create a spectacle that ultimately remains isolated and can have fascist connotations, especially when it involves mass movements. Walter Benjamin speaks of aes-

theticization of politics as a fascist strategy, and of politicization as a communist approach.[42] But in the case of the Tupamaros, the purpose of the entry of aesthetics into politics is to activate and empower people; the purpose of fascist aesthetics is to achieve the opposite through indoctrination and derailed focus. As Susan Sontag points out, “they flow from (and justify) a preoccupation with situations of control, submissive behavior, extravagant effort and the endurance of pain.”[43] The effective use of aesthetics is therefore rather tricky from a political point of view. The popular rallies organized to protest World Trade Organization (WTO) meetings raised this concern once again. Analyzing these issues in the context of a society that is not openly repressive, Uruguayan artist and critic Clemente Padín wrote:

> In a political act we find political elements, and subsequently elements that are social, religious, aesthetic, etc. Art in the street doesn’t anesthetize politics, but assumes the aesthetic instances of politics and tries to direct them against their creators. . . . [A]rt in the street does not formulate positions, but criticizes the apparently evident, normal and natural rules of the game that, without openly being repressive, determine what is allowed and what is not. . . . Attacking [them] and formulating one’s own rules means to question the legitimacy of the system.[44]

7 Tucumán arde
POLITICS IN ART

The Tupamaros provided Latin America with a model that could be seen as a political parallel to happenings in art, giving a definite function to what artistically had been the result of a formalist speculation. Describing a happening he performed in the Hansa Gallery in 1958, Allan Kaprow pointed out the formalist qualities of his artistic enterprise:

> We ourselves are shapes (though we are not often conscious of this fact). We have differently colored clothing; can move, feel, speak and observe others variously; and will constantly change the "meaning" of the work by so doing. There is, therefore, a never-ending play of changing conditions between the relatively fixed or "scored" parts of my work and the "unexpected" or undetermined parts.[1]

This statement is historically important because at the time it helped pulverize the technical enclosures of the media used to express art, but today the statement reads as an elaborate speculation about choreography. In fact, Kaprow willfully keeps politics out of the picture. In a text of 1964, Kaprow made his position clear as to where the limits are:

> Political responsibility is more than mere reaction to injustice and feeling for a cause; it is action planned for results. Political awareness may be everyone's duty, but political expertise belongs to the politician.[2]

It was a position shared by many intellectuals, French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss among them, whose refusal to take a stand on the war in Vietnam was grounded in similar reasoning. These thinkers implicitly or explicitly believed in the division of labor among disciplines, and politics for them was definitively a separate and different discipline. Kaprow sought to place what he considered everyday life experience into a perceptually homogenized field—a rather tension-free and stable collection of actions oblivious of context and even of the "political awareness" he suggests in his quote. He made an admirable radical move in going beyond the reigning disciplinary division of the arts and

forced a reconsideration of artistic media. However, reflecting the enormous pressure of his surrounding culture, in his approach the social status quo remained untouched.

Happenings, nevertheless, had a major impact in Latin America. It was a format that reappeared in practically all countries, from the media-oriented events in Argentina during the sixties, to political interventions in Chile and Mexico in the mid and late seventies, to theatrical events in Cuba—particularly by Leandro Soto—during the early eighties that later evolved into more politically influential events by other artists.

Tucumán arde (*Tucumán Is Burning*), an event organized by an artists' collective in 1968, first in the Argentinean city of Rosario and then in Buenos Aires, pushed the artistic project to the borderline of the political project. It seemed like a mirror process of what the Tupamaros had done coming from the political end.

For artists in Latin America, the wish to affect society in deeper ways than what a formalist education could do had become increasingly important. An ongoing interest in the interrelation of art and social issues, and the traditional emphasis on the weight that content had in artistic formulations, set the stage for the next step. It was only a matter of time before political strategy itself was affected by art, as well as art by political strategy. The experience of repression, awareness of severe socioeconomic inequality, and opposition to the Vietnam War converged to trigger the intervention of art into politics in a more explosive way. Even artists originally distant from social issues became politicized.

Argentinean artists were well informed about the European avant-garde movements and their attempt to organize what Peter Bürger describes as a "new praxis for life from a basis in art."[3] Artists and militants on the Left also perceived, as Bürger puts it, that "art is the objectification of the self-understanding of the bourgeois class," functioning separately from the praxis of the majority.[4] The new project for Argentinean artists became the revision of art so as to engage with issues of class. In pursuing this project, artists and political activists seemed to reverse strategies. Artists rationalized their strategies in terms of politics, and political groups intuited their way into aesthetics. While artists tried to develop strategies that were "rational" (practical, effective), political activists were guided by a wish and a need to create their own mythology on the one hand, and to find a stage in the national and international mass media on the other.[5]

During 1968, Argentina witnessed an increasing rebellion by artists against the government. The brutal repression of the military dictatorship and the limits imposed on artists' freedom of expression developed into a crisis. Artist

Roberto Plate, on the occasion of the exhibit Experiencias 1968, constructed a set of restrooms in the gallery of the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella.[6] Those who entered the rooms found that there were no fixtures and that the walls had been taken over by graffiti that served as a vehicle for criticism of the government. Of course, this violated the law of the junta, and soon the police came to close both the bathroom installation and the exhibit as a whole. Police invoked two articles of the Penal Code: one that prohibited obscene images and objects, and another that prohibited offense to the "dignity or decorum of a public functionary" (in this case, the dictator Juan Carlos Onganía). When Enrique Oteiza, director of the Institute, argued that it was absurd to close the whole exhibit because of one offensive work, the police backed off. They sealed and guarded the bathroom, and the public was allowed to visit the rest of the exhibition. The presence of police guards and the censorship of the bathroom installation thus became another piece in the show. It is curious that at the time nobody, not even the artists, read this episode as confirming the success and potential of a strategy by which authority could be manipulated into embarrassing itself.[7]

In response to the police action at the Instituto Di Tella, the artists in the exhibit protested by removing their works from the gallery. They took them to the street and, in a public action, destroyed them. The artists' indignation inspired other actions as well. Among them was a sit-in at the site where a lecture was to be given by Jorge Romero Brest, director of the gallery of the Instituto Di Tella. The gallery had been the flagship of avant-garde art movements and experiments in Latin America for nearly a decade, and Romero Brest was more than its captain; he was its pope. A statement read by artist Juan Pablo Renzi (1940–1992) at the sit-in announced:

> We believe that art signifies an active engagement with reality, active because it aspires to transform this class society into a better one. . . . As a consequence, we declare that the life of "Che" Guevara and the actions of the French students are works of art of greater importance than the majority of the stupidities hanging on the walls of the thousands of museums around the world.
>
> We aspire to transform each piece of reality into an art object that turns upon the consciousness of the world, revealing the intimate contradictions of this class society.
>
> Down with all the institutions, long live the art of the Revolution.[8]

What is worth noting is the rupture these events represented in the careers of the artists involved. Only one year earlier, most of the ten artists who partici-

pated in the sit-in had been belated minimalists derivative of the North American movement of the midsixties. A visit by U.S. artist Sol LeWitt to Buenos Aires in 1967 had the effect of reaffirming minimalism rather than encouraging experimentation along the lines of his conceptual manifesto "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" (1967). Renzi produced some team works with LeWitt that can be seen as transition work in his career before he became fully politicized in his art. Six of the others protesting the censorship at the Di Tella exhibition had previously exhibited in Estructuras Primarias II, an exhibit organized in 1967 in homage to curator Kynaston McShine's Primary Structures exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York the previous year. Curator Jorge Glusberg, who organized Estructuras Primarias II, characterized the effort as formalist in impulse and objectives, and emphasized in the catalogue's introduction that the Argentinean artists involved "create situations similar to those presented in May of 1966 at the Jewish Museum of New York by forty-two British and [North] American artists."[9]

Against this background, the significance of the sit-in becomes even clearer. The artists were coming to realize the political implication of the path they had taken. As one of the participants, Graciela Carnevale, wrote:

> It was taking stock by a group of artists of their own conditions and proposing to modify them. This consciousness led to questioning the role of the artist in society, form, and content, and to considering a correspondence between art and life that forced a review of artistic practice from an ethical consciousness. Reality did not allow for doubts, and facts demanded clear answers.[10]

All the protesting artists were from the city of Rosario, in the province of Santa Fe, and their outlook came from the provinces rather than from the capital. They were the product of a double colonization, in which mainstream values in art were first imported and adopted in Buenos Aires, and then after being digested there, were added to the national canon. In reacting to the censorship, the artists woke up to this double process and reacted to it with a heightened militancy reinforced by the indignation over the war in Vietnam.

From the perspective of the interior provinces, Tucumán—an impoverished province that was also one of the biggest sugar-producing regions in the country—came to be seen as a pointed example of governmental hypocrisy and negligence. Out of twenty-three Argentinean provinces, it ranked sixth in production, but sixteenth in literacy, fifteenth in infant mortality, and thirteenth in school retention. As early as 1964, the Frente Revolucionario Indoamericano

Popular (FRIP; Popular Indo-American Revolutionary Front), a group with Trotskyite tendencies located in Tucumán, recognized the untenable situation and chose the province as a possible focus for rebellion. They announced that "the role of the rural proletariat, with its avant-garde, the sugar proletariat, is the detonator of the Argentinean revolution," and prepared for a long battle.[11] Mario Roberto Santucho, who became the FRIP 's leader, later headed the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP) and was killed on July 19, 1976, during a shoot-out with Captain Juan Carlos Leonetti. Leonetti, who also died in the exchange, was honored by the Argentinean army with the creation of a Museum of Subversion named after him.

As conditions of the times continued to radicalize ideology in Tucumán, the dictatorship headed by Juan Carlos Onganía chose the province as a place to exemplify the soundness of his government's policies. To that effect, the government publicized a fictional industrialization plan and promoted the slogan "Tucumán, the Garden of the Republic," which was accompanied by idyllic posters. The rhetoric was an orchestrated cover-up of the economic and political crisis. Onganía himself had visited the area and promised that Tucumán would once again become "a pole of prosperity and development, a center that irradiates culture and progress, a place of national pride."[12] Some of his text was then used under the picture of a child who was, according to the title, "looking into the future with confidence."

In August 1968, artists from Rosario and Buenos Aires organized the "First National Meeting of Avant-Garde Art" to consider the development of a form of art that would be totally new: ethically, aesthetically, and ideologically.[13] Concerned about the traditional co-optation of any form of art able to intervene and possibly disturb society, the participants agreed on several points: (1) the development of art could no longer consist of the creation of an avant-garde movement; (2) art could no longer be shown in galleries or museums; (3) art could no longer be restricted to addressing only an elite public; (4) art had to challenge society and achieve results similar to those of political actions, but in a more long-lasting manner and on a deeper cultural level.

With the help of sociologists, economists, journalists, and photographers, the group decided to start an operation of "counter information" to counteract the government's publicity about Tucumán and to reveal the real condition of the province. As they put it, their aims were "to become publicists and activists in the social struggle in Tucumán" and "to create a parallel subversive culture to wear out the official culture machinery."[14] In an interview with Carlos Basualdo (Rosario, February 21, 1992), Rubén Naranjo, one of the participants, explained

that what they wanted to do was "to have art open a space in which social reality is offered in a dimension that exceeds denunciation of the kind usually provided by social or political chronicles." The interdisciplinary space would not only raise consciousness about social conditions but also equip the people to take corrective measures, and the name of the project would be *Tucumán arde* (*Tucumán Is Burning*).[15]

At the last moment, it was the Rosario artists who bore the brunt of the work. Only two artists from Buenos Aires—León Ferrari and Roberto Jacoby—stayed on the team and survived the ideological dissension within the group. The exhibition took place in the buildings of the Confederación General de Trabajadores de los Argentinos (CGT; General Workers Confederation of the Argentines) in the cities of Rosario, where it opened with three thousand visitors; Santa Fe; and Buenos Aires. Added to the group's slogan "Tucumán arde" was a subtitle: "The Garden of Miseries." Sometime earlier, the leaders of the union had shown sympathy for the plight of artists. In the months preceding the show, the union had supplied lawyers for the defense of ten artists who had been jailed for protesting censorship by throwing eggs and fruit during the awards ceremony for the Premio Braque competition.[16]

Information for the project was gathered in Tucumán, notably with deviously solicited official help. The artists held press conferences in which, with studied omission, they described their project as the pursuit of a cultural profile of the province. Using that ruse, they were able to use the available conventional media, infiltrating them to receive favorable coverage for their project. The ploy worked and, up to that point, they received complimentary comments in the press.

In publicizing the project, the team used both legal and illegal means. In open advertisements, posters, and projected slides in movie houses, they only used the word "Tucumán." In subversive actions, such as when painting on walls, they sprayed the full slogan "Tucumán arde." In fact, it was this group that introduced the use of spray cans for graffiti in Argentina. The group called this two-step creation of expectations its "incognito strategy."[17]

In Rosario, the final installation occupied four floors of the CGT building. Forty people contributed to the creation of the show, of whom thirty signed the leaflet distributed at the exhibition. The exhibits included collected interviews with the people about living conditions in Tucumán, mural photographs, and research about the accumulation of wealth by the richer families. Walking in, the public stepped on the names of the owners of the sugar plantations. Coffee grown in Tucumán was served (without sugar) and the rooms were darkened every ten

Figure 7.1. *Tucumán arde,* 1968, installation view. Courtesy of Graciela Carnevale.

minutes to represent the frequency of deaths of children. The facts were explained each time through loudspeakers in every room.

The manifesto distributed at the opening of the show in Rosario asked for a revolutionary art, that is,

> total art, an art that modifies the totality of the social structure; an art that transforms, one that destroys the idealist separation between the artwork and reality; an art that is social, which is one that merges with the revolutionary fight against economic dependency and class oppression.

In Rosario, *Tucumán arde* lasted two weeks, but in Buenos Aires, it was closed after two days. Police pressure on the unions became so strong that the CGT caved in rather than risk sacrificing higher stakes.

Tucumán arde was both a success and a failure. Despite the short duration of the events, it set a paradigmatic model for an all-out art/political action. But because participants had focused only on the event and not on a broader strategy that would generate other events, the group was at a loss as to how to continue.

Figures 7.2 (top) and 7.3. *Tucumán arde,* 1968, installation view. Courtesy of Graciela Carnevale.

The artists had not developed any strategic thinking and had neglected to plan follow-up projects set into a broader framework or agenda. Disillusionment and a sense of impotence spread among the artists. After *Tucumán arde*, police and army repression increased and most of the artists who had been involved in the project stopped producing art for a period of several years. Some went underground and joined the guerrilla movement, some were "disappeared," and at least one of them, Eduardo Favario, died in action after joining the ERP.[18] A kind of de facto art strike spontaneously ensued and lasted for several years. Galleries only showed apolitical and harmless traditional paintings. The period became known as the "Silence of *Tucumán arde*."

Rubén Naranjo explained this silence as a consequence of the lack of a common political code within the *Tucumán arde* team. As artists, they were reluctant to repeat the formal structure they had developed for Tucumán by applying it to other subjects. Their art had turned into politics, but as they lacked a solid political background, they were at a loss as to how to deal with cultural events that exploded into hot political situations.[19] They had no formal system that might translate their utopian ideas into reality. Moreover, as Carnevale later remarked: "To continue meant to deepen the initiated path, to deepen ruptures and [not] to accept political compromise. To deepen the risk."[20]

The art strike, the silence, and the abstention affected many other artists as well, including some who belonged to older generations. Jorge De la Vega (1930–1971), a neofigurative painter, shifted from painting to singing and became prominent in the Latin American "protest song" movement. Shortly before his death, he had begun to merge exhibits with concerts. Luis Felipe Noé (1933–) stopped painting for seven years to write and teach before finding the will to resume his career as an artist.

Another one of the *Tucumán arde* participants, Nicolás Rosa, reminisces:

> We went (or tried to go) from a somewhat de-museumified art to a political engagement. . . . We ultimately did something we could call *mass-mediated* art, which meant we were operating on the media—and we knew that the media impose their own ideology because of their own form of production, organization, etc.[21]

Renzi offered a simpler explanation in 1991:

> *Tucumán arde*, I believe, was the ultimate extreme of the notion of conceptualism, after which one couldn't produce any conceptual work or any other [kind of art] . . .[22]

Some months after *Tucumán arde*, in March of 1969, another group, the Coordinating Committee of the Revolutionary Imagination, publicized a new manifesto in which they declared the uselessness of any art made in a bourgeois manner:

> Art is any message which transforms, which creates and destroys, which breaks the boundaries of the system's tolerance. . . . We no longer can realize individual work, but should design and organize an alternative cultural strategy which will be totally independent and systematically oppose Western "art and culture," the mass media, coercion and terror. Effectiveness is the only valid aesthetic.[23]

Many of those artists who stayed in the field tried to keep working in more conventional political art forms. Some went to Chile and helped design political murals for the Salvador Allende campaign in 1969. Two, Carnevale and Roberto Puzzolo, made documentary films and eventually recorded what was known as the Ezeiza Massacre, in 1973, when on the occasion of former dictator Juan Perón's return from exile, right-wing paramilitary groups fired into the crowd that had gathered at the Ezeiza airport to greet him.

Although *Tucumán arde* was designed to affect "the people," and more specifically "the exploited people" (who, in effect, were supposed to become coauthors), its main impact was on the elite, which included those artists who defined themselves as part of the avant-garde and had used the Instituto Di Tella gallery as their main exhibit space. The gallery, confronted with an increasingly hostile and repressive government and the atmosphere created by the "silence" mentioned earlier, closed soon after, on June 1, 1970. The void was then filled by the Centro de Arte y Comunicación (CAYC), an institution primarily focused on mainstream art.

More narrowly interpreted, *Tucumán arde* could be said to have backfired. Previously, the Di Tella had dared to exhibit at least some of the work expressing opposition to the dictatorship, and it certainly had not shied away from controversy and scandal. Confident in its own power (the Di Tella conglomerate that financed the institution produced, among many other things, the Argentinean version of Fiat cars), the gallery afforded a venue for self-mockery. I was among those whose political art received encouragement. In 1969, Romero Brest not only paid for a series of antifascist postcards I prepared for a mail exhibition, but also allowed me to write "Contemporary Colonial Art" on the window of the gallery that faced the crowded Florida Street. The words, in big letters, were designed to appear as the fake title of the whole exhibition. The ambiguity was

celebrated by both Romero Brest and Samuel Paz (then assistant director of the gallery). What I had hoped to do was to contextualize an otherwise mostly apolitical exhibit in the rooms of the Institute. Ultimately, of course, I was the one being contextualized and drawn into a traditional frame of reference. Needless to say, I didn't see it that way at the time, and what stands out for me now in retrospect is that the Institute was then the only regular exhibition space in Argentina that would even have considered my piece.

Throughout this time, the authors of *Tucumán arde* saw themselves as removed from any artistic "style," to the point that former members of the group still resent any association with mainstream conceptualism. León Ferrari explains:

> But those who connect *Tucumán arde* with conceptual art forget that this is a new "avant-garde" [belonging] to the same elite that the people of *Tucumán arde* abandoned, not only because they were serving and ornamenting it, because they were making weapons for the enemy, but also because the elite contaminated their work, because the language invented for and from the elite was useless for communicating with the new public that was sought. *Tucumán arde* used art to make politics. The greatest part of conceptual art and of some expressions of contemporary political art use politics as a subject matter to make art.[24]

Ferrari makes the point that traditional art forms dull political action when they limit themselves to a reference to ideas rather than to their implementation. Later in the same paper and still talking about *Tucumán arde*, Ferrari continued:

> Art was measured within different parameters: what serves revolution, what does not serve revolution, and what serves counterrevolution.

Rather than connecting with the avant-garde, Ferrari prefers to establish a link between Tucumán Arde and the Grupo Espartaco, founded in 1959 and led by Argentine painter Ricardo Carpani (1930–1997). Espartaco tried to create a figuration that was a militant alternative to Soviet socialist realism, sort of a Trotskyite socialist realism as opposed to a Stalinist one. The artists used distortion of the figures with some indigenous flavor and formal solutions inspired by Mexican muralist painting. They saw themselves as going out to the masses by painting murals in workers union buildings. Ferrari's link made sense if one left out formal analyses and focused on goals and on the wish to avoid art-institutional venues. In that sense, a definition of art was abandoned for the sake of a political definition of the effect of art.

Consistent with this position, Renzi resented any connection of his work with mainstream conceptual art, and accused both Lucy Lippard and Jorge Glusberg of erroneously linking him and his group to that movement. He states:

> Bourgeois culture always tended to remove content from any art creation, and this conceptual art of today is no more than a content-less (and senseless) variation of our efforts to communicate political messages.[25]

He then gives the reasons that separate his and his colleagues' "messages" from mainstream conceptual art:

> (1) We are not interested in having them considered as aesthetic. (2) We structure them according to their content. (3) They are always political and not always transmitted through official channels like this one. (4) We are not interested in them as works per se, but as means to denounce exploitation.[26]

It is obvious that a clear solution to the question of how to erase the art/politics borderline was not found by the Tucumán rebels, but at least the contradictions were sharply revealed. Art-as-object serves preestablished interests, and art-for-revolution tries to break down the power of those same established interests. The problematic aspects of the enterprise became clear. "Revolution" is the product of a political definition; art has not yet been seriously accepted as an activity capable of producing its own definition of revolution. Art is only expected to define and refine its own formal rules, and not to redefine itself as political activity. In a letter to Jorge Romero Brest as director of the Instituto Di Tella, artist Pablo Suárez (Argentina, 1937–) wrote of his frustration with this limitation, and of the loss of power the artist suffers once a piece or an action is exhibited in an artistic context:

> If it occurred to me to write LONG LIVE THE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTION in Spanish, English or Chinese, it would be exactly the same. Everything is art. Those four walls bear the secret to transform everything that is within them into art, and art is not dangerous. (The fault is ours.)[27]

Tucumán arde was an example of art fully going into the political arena, whereas the Tupamaros represented an aestheticization of politics. The merger of political zeal and art thinking had reached its peak. The Tupamaros continued their aestheticized operations for a few years, until their demise. Art returned to its more formal path and the traditional gallery showcase. Nevertheless, in Latin American conceptualism, however much reduced, politi-

cal content and the dream of subversion of exploitative and repressive regimes continued to be important, at least for a while.

On balance, one can say that Latin American conceptualism emerged as an aesthetic more concerned with reality than with abstraction. The fact that this distinctive characteristic has been overlooked by mainstream U.S. commentators on Latin American art denotes a narrowness of interpretation that has been applied to conceptualist strategies in general and particularly to those that took effect on the periphery.[28]

8 *The Aftermath of* Tucumán arde

The activities that followed the *Tucumán arde* "silence" in Argentina were, if political at all, mostly restricted to protest demonstrations. It took some years for visions of radical social change to revive and follow the points made in 1968. One exception, but without a public dimension, was a piece by Jorge Carballa. In 1969, he secretly contracted several churches in Buenos Aires to celebrate mass in honor of Che Guevara on the anniversary of his death.

It then took four years for a piece with a political edge to appear. In 1973, a group of artists created an installation called *Proceso a nuestra realidad* (*Process toward Our Reality*) in the Museum of Modern Art of Buenos Aires for the Salón Acrílicopaolini. It was a cement block wall, seven meters long and two meters high, covered with graffiti and posters, just as one would find on the street. The main inscription was "Ezeiza es Trelew" (Ezeiza is Trelew). Ezeiza refers to the international airport of Buenos Aires, and Trelew is an airport in the south of Argentina. Both places provided a stage for mass killings under the military dictatorship. As already mentioned, a shoot-out took place when former president and dictator Juan Perón returned to Argentina and arrived in Ezeiza in 1973. Thirteen people died and 365 were wounded in the gunfire exchanged between right- and left-wing Peronists. In 1972, political prisoners who were held in the nearby Rawson naval base escaped and took over Trelew airport. Nineteen were brought back to jail, sixteen of whom were machine-gunned a week later by the dictatorship.

Proceso a nuestra realidad was accompanied by an invitation card. On one side it had a drop of blood made with acrylic paint. This material detail justified the presence of the piece in the exhibition that had been organized for the promotion of plastic products. The drop was accompanied by a text that referred to the massacres. On the other side of the card was a second text that started with:

> No/For a nonelitist
> nonselective
> noncompetitive
> nonnegotiable art.[1]

Ten years later and fifteen years after *Tucumán arde* (September 21, 1983), a more ambitious project took place when the center of Buenos Aires was covered with silhouettes of corpses. They were chalked on the streets or cut out of paper and glued to the walls of buildings and had, stenciled inside, the names of the *desaparecidos* (disappeared), or missing people. The main concentration of the silhouettes was located on the central Plaza de Mayo, where the images accompanied the Third March of Resistance organized by the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo.[2] The event, known as *El siluetazo*, was conceived by three artists: Julio Flores, Guillermo Kexel, and Rodolfo Agueberry.[3] It was financed by two organizations, the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo and the Grandmothers of the Disappeared. The idea was to put up 30,000 silhouettes, which was estimated to be the number of people imprisoned and killed by the dictatorship between 1976 and 1983. The operation became a major popular event, and the silhouettes were a regular presence at subsequent rallies.[4]

The movement of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo is an aesthetic action of its own, although its source is grief, not art. On April 30, 1977, fourteen mothers of disappeared victims went to the square in front of the Casa Rosada, the presidential palace. They protested not only the disappearance of their children but also the secrecy and lack of information they faced. Headed by Azucena Villaflor, who herself was to be kidnapped and "disappeared" eight months later, they wore white kerchiefs over their heads, symbolizing the diapers used for their children. The ceremony extended to all the provinces of Argentina. In Ledesma, Jujuy, there is one mother who, as of 1999, was still making her individual procession in the central square. From 1981 onward, the movement appropriated the square on a regular and organized basis, staging "Marches of Resistance" and enduring police harassment. They were threatened with machine guns and attack dogs. The slogan for these actions was "Appearance Alive," as opposed to "disappearance," which meant "presumed dead."[5]

El siluetazo generated a sequence of activities. In 1984, enlarged photographs of the "disappeared" were affixed on the walls around Plaza de Mayo in celebration of the International Day of the Woman. In 1985, an event with the title *450 Thursdays That Restored Dignity* had everybody wear white masks. In 1989, under the catchword "social readymade," several art actions were organized in support of the victims of Tiananmen Square.[6] The most notorious was *Bicicletas a la China* (*Bicycles, Chinese Fashion*). The organizers gathered dozens of cyclists in the center of Buenos Aires and had them construct "heroic sculptures" with their bicycles.[7] The rally also involved patients from the insane asylum where the organizers worked. The event alluded not only to Tiananmen but also to a cam-

Figure 8.1. (left) Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1977, news clipping, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Figure 8.2. (top right) Graffiti on the Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2004. Photo Selby Hickey.

Figure 8.3. (bottom right) Path of the weekly procession of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2005. Photo Selby Hickey.

paign of then president Menem, who, in an effort to save gas, was promoting the use of bicycles. Over all, the whole affair was to be seen as a Sino-Argentinean political collage that included the memory of *Tucumán arde.*

The weight of the political situation in many of the countries of Latin America during the two decades from the midsixties to the mideighties was such that, in 1986, Uruguayan conceptualist Jorge Caraballo (1941–) published a pointed *Breve historia del arte en Latinoamérica* (*Brief History of Art in Latin America*) as a

Figure 8.4. Jorge Caraballo, “Hidrocinetismo” (Hydrokineticism), *Breve historia del arte en Latinoamérica* (Brief History of Art in Latin America), 1986. Courtesy of Jorge Caraballo.

work of art. It consisted of titles of several art movements (“Gestualism,” “Hydrokineticism,” “Realism,” etc.) and not much more than that. However, instead of the expected pictures, the movements were illustrated with photographs taken of incidents of repressive actions by the government and protest actions by the people of Montevideo. Hydrokineticism, of course, showed a crowd being dispersed with water cannons; Realism was represented by a view through the bars of a jail window; and the U.S. School, by armed antiriot police. In January 2002, a new group was created in Argentina. It bore the broader name Argentina Arde (Argentina Is Burning).

It is not clear how pointed the influence and repercussions of *Tucumán arde* were in the rest of the continent, but it is a fact that, at various times since then, politically motivated collective movements sprang up in different places. One of the bastions of politicized conceptualist activities still in existence during the seventies was a continental movement of mail art. It was inspired by the early work in the field by U.S. artist Ray Johnson, who had already started during the early fifties and founded his New York Correspondence school in 1963. The movement included both poets (generally inspired by concrete poetry) and visual artists. Meanwhile, a second attempt to go from art into politics was taken up from the midseventies onward, this time mostly by groups in Mexico, Chile, and Peru. Mexico was particularly fertile. So many groups were organized there that at one point the term "Los Grupos" (The Groups) became the popular title for the movement. While some of these started earlier in the decade, their political engagement appeared later.

Mail Art

The epidemic of dictatorships that spanned Latin America from the sixties to the mideighties made the use of mail a perfect vehicle to allow for the communication between isolated artists and the rest of the world. The network became important enough to justify the organization of international exhibits in Uruguay (1974), Argentina (1975), and Brazil (1976), and in Mexico and other countries shortly thereafter. The notoriety of these efforts had two consequences: the number of mail artists increased greatly, and censorship became more sophisticated and intense.

In Latin America, mail art was immediately used for politicized art and was considered subversive enough to lead to the imprisonment of several artists. In 1976, Paulo Bruscky and Daniel Santiago were jailed for some days in Brazil.[8] The following year, in Uruguay, Clemente Padín and Jorge Caraballo went to prison for several years. In 1981, Jesús Romeo Galdamez Escobar was kidnapped by the Salvadorian military.[9] The indictments of Padín and Caraballo were for "anti–North American convictions, moral offense, and offending the army's reputation."

The new network created a "parallel, alternative, and marginal" distribution circuit, which didn't really threaten the dictators, but certainly did attack them.[10] It also served to keep artists in exile in the loop, exchanging work and ideas. As Guillermo Deisler (1940–1995), a Chilean artist exiled in Bulgaria, wrote: "For the Latin Americans—and we are already many creators who have gone into exile voluntarily or been forced by political circumstances—mail art becomes a

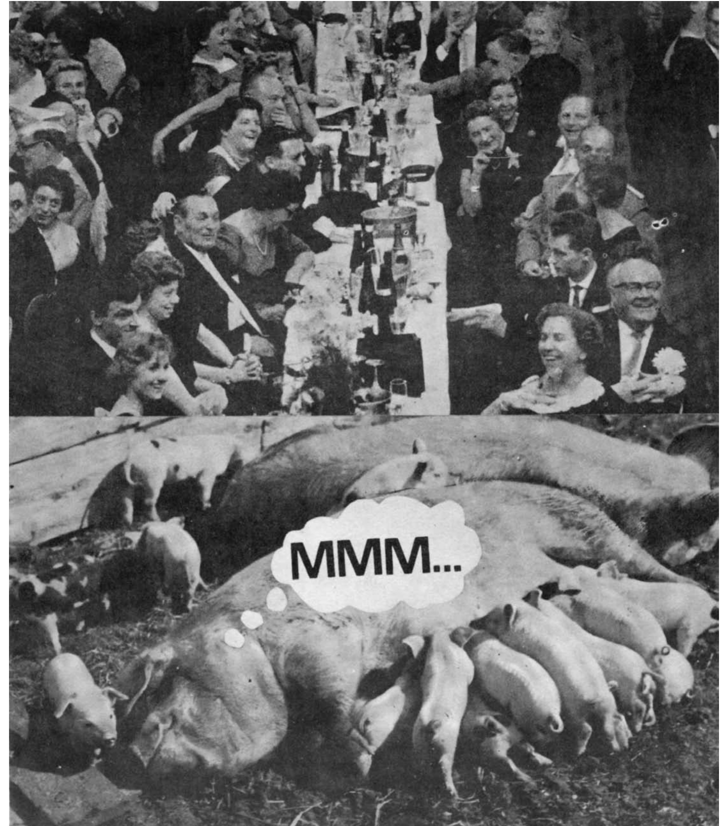


Figure 8.5. (above) Clemente Padín, "*Ay!*" 1973. Courtesy of Clemente Padín.

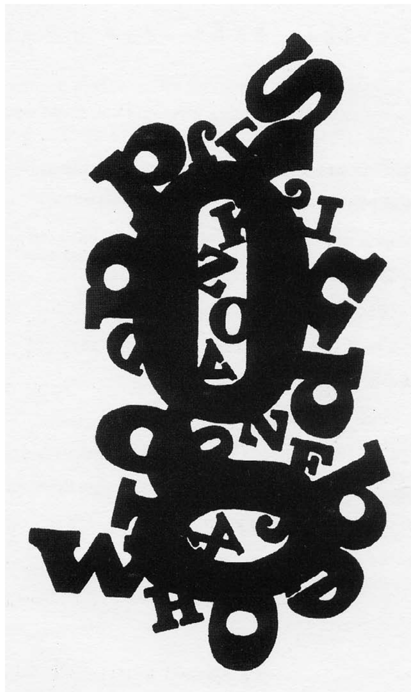
Figure 8.6. Guillermo Deisler, "*MMM . . . ,*" *Poesía visiva en el mundo,* 1972. Collection of Luis Camnitzer.

palliative that neutralizes this condition of 'deceased citizens,' as Paraguayan [writer] Augusto Roa Bastos calls this massive emigration of cultural workers of the South American continent."[11]

The mail pieces mostly looked like a cross between miniposters and concrete poetry reduced to mail size, often bearing explicit political content. It took advantage of and was heavily influenced by the availability of photocopying machines. Xerography—since Xerox had branded the whole field—took the place of laborious photomontage and prepared the aesthetic path for Photoshop. As Hugo Pontes points out: "The talent of the artist becomes evident and refers to the association of images . . . the artist focuses on the interrelation of images and their content, which will act on the viewer-reader."[12] Mail art also had its formalist aspects and explored tautological and self-referential themes. Padín, probably the most important theoretician among the Latin American mail artists, speaks of the absorption of "the noise of the [information] channel." By "noise" he meant, for example, the exploitation of the visual qualities of the stamps required for mailing and the effects of the inclusion of carbon paper in an envelope so that the handling of the mail piece would leave a visible record.[13] Padín

classifies mail art into three categories: (1) circulation of reproductions without reflecting the medium, (2) integration of the "noise" without overpowering the structure of the work, and (3) the use of the "noise" to create the work itself.

The basic concept of mail art underwent modifications over time. With the work of some artists, it took its place among the gallery art it had been fighting; with others, it evolved more into media events, eventually reaching the Internet. Chilean artist Eugenio Dittborn (1943–) is probably the most well-known example of the first tendency. Since 1984 he has been producing his *Airmail Paintings*, in which he picks up on imagery he developed during the late 1970s. He sends these all over the world, and then follows them to make installations that often include a performance of reading texts describing the itinerary. Silk-screened, painted, and drawn on very big sheets of kraft paper (ca. 7 × 5 ft.), they are folded into a mailable size before the work is made. The crease lines create a compositional grid that organizes the imagery and ensures that the refolding for the mailing won't interfere with the imagery. Dittborn's works eventually reentered the regular art circuit, where they have become well-received exhibition pieces. His format outlived the original constraints posed by political isolation, and today his work can be valued irrespective of a particular political context.



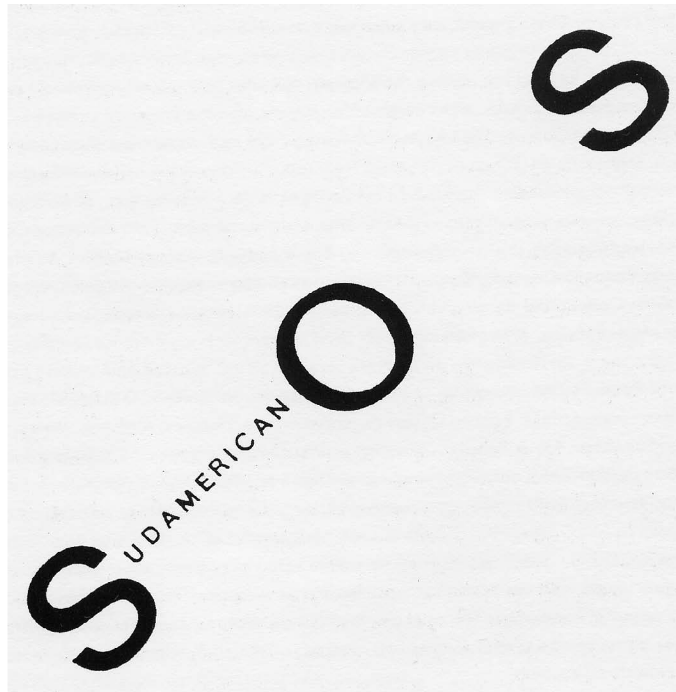


Figure 8.7. (above left) Clemente Padín, *Texto V* (*Text V*), 1968. Courtesy of Clemente Padín.

Figure 8.8. Jorge Caraballo, *SOS,* 1973. Courtesy of Jorge Caraballo.

Cuban artist Tania Bruguera's *Memoria de la posguerra* is an example of the second tendency. Until recently, Cuban artists stayed out of the postal network. Mail art appeared there only after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of the Soviet subsidies to the Cuban economy. Artists suffered from the lack of materials, a situation that led artist Tania Bruguera (1968–) to create her publication *Memoria de la posguerra* (*Postwar Memory*) in 1993. It was a self-financed publication that relied heavily on the post office for international distribution (in Cuba, it was mainly distributed by hand). *Memoria* served to maintain cohesiveness in the community of artists in Cuba and to make a connection with artists in other countries. It also served as a bridge with those Cuban artists who were living outside the country, helping to blur the rigid lines drawn between the different sides of the Cuban political divide. After the second issue, government pressure put an end to it.[14]

Although still practiced today and continuing its political function of protesting crimes against human rights and ecology, mail art is now more or less obsolete thanks to the World Wide Web. In 1999, Argentinean mail artists were successful in getting the government to designate December 5 as "Mail Art Day." It satisfied a somewhat puzzling desire to become incorporated into the establishment. Meanwhile, in Chile in 1998, three people involved in the organization of a mail art exhibition had been fired from their jobs. The show, Stop: Liberty, Diversity, and Pluralism, was a homage to Guillermo Deisler, heavily anti-Pinochet in content and objectionable to the bureaucracy left over from the old regime.[15]

Figure 8.9. Postage seal commemorating Mail Art Day, December 5, 1999, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Los Grupos

During the middle and late seventies, a second generation of political artists relying on conceptualist devices appeared in countries where the first wave of conceptualist rupture had been missed. In many cases, direct political action was part of it. Both in Chile and Mexico, the more "direct" political events were heavily influenced by a late dawning awareness of U.S. "happenings" and of an art movement called Fluxus. Mexican artist Felipe Ehrenberg, one of the later leaders of Grupo Pentágono (he joined in 1976), had been connected with Fluxus activities during a stay in London, and Wolf Vostell, a happening artist, had visited Chile during the 1970s. However, in both cases, local traditions also played a very prominent part. The Grupo Pentágono, one of the groups within Los Grupos, refers itself back to an event in Mexican history.[16] Apparently, sometime in the

1920s, an exhibition opened at the *escuelas al aire libre* (open-air schools) and the *centros populares de pintura* (people's painting centers). While the public audience and the authorities (including the minister of education) were waiting for the ceremony to begin, everybody was looking at a closed curtain, which was to be opened after a speech officially inaugurating the exhibit. Suddenly, a clown riding an elephant entered the room and proceeded to read the inaugural speech from an interminably long scroll.[17]

Most of the activities of Grupo Pentágono, which claims to be the oldest of Los Grupos, were more focused on environmental installations and happenings than on conceptualism. The installations, some of which date back to 1968 and 1970, consisted of strings, stones, papers, and drawings of figures. In later years, they expanded to include photographs and mirrors. By 1973, the projects became more precise and pointed, but belonged and were credited mostly to single authors among the members of the group. Víctor Muñoz filled a soccer goalkeeper's net with newspapers, and José Antonio Hernández Amezcua prevented people from seeing his paintings in a gallery by closing the entrance to the room with barbed wire. That same year, he painted *Libertad pr . . .* (*Pr[ovisional] Freedom*) on

Figure 8.10. José Antonio Hernández Amezcua, *Libertad pr . . .* (*Pr[ovisional] Freedom*), 1973. Photo Víctor Muñoz, Archivo del Grupo Proceso Pentágono, courtesy of Víctor Muñoz.

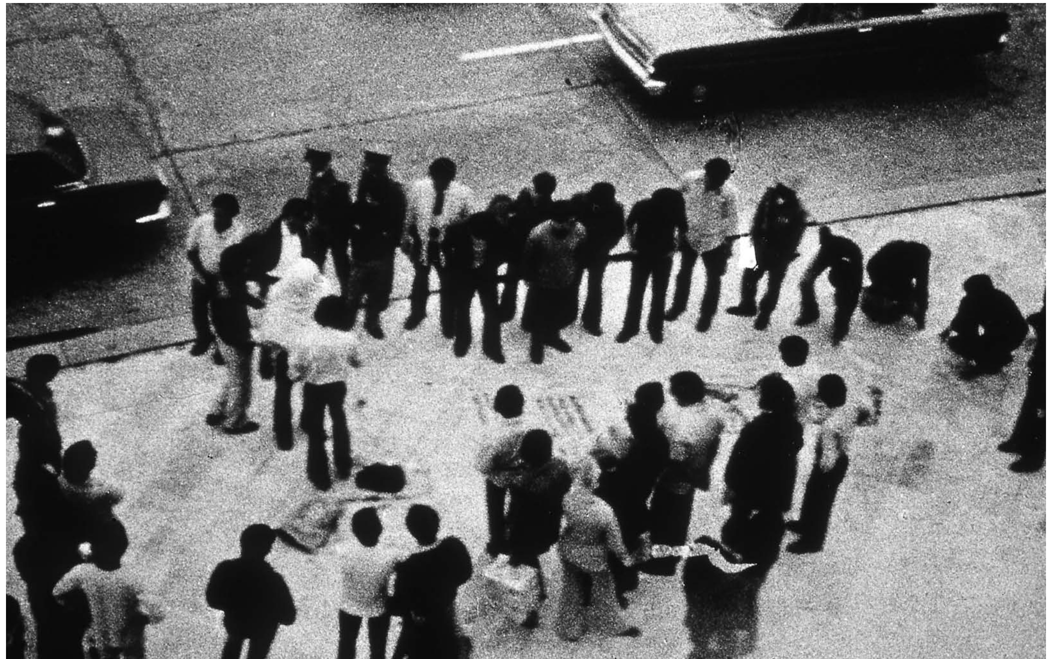


Figure 8.12. Carlos Finck, *El hombre atropellado* (*Runover Man*), 1973, Grupo Proceso Pentágono ("A nivel informativo" [On an Information Level]) installation. Photo Víctor Muñoz, Archivo del Grupo Proceso Pentágono, courtesy of Víctor Muñoz.

Figure 8.11.(left) Lourdes Grobet, *Hora y media* (*Hour and a Half*), 1974. Photo Víctor Muñoz, Archivo del Grupo Proceso Pentágono, courtesy of Víctor Muñoz.

a wall to which he added bullet marks. Lourdes Grobet enlarged "the four orifices of the body" to the size of photomurals. The images of the orifices had openings, and members of the public were encouraged to put their hands through them. Their action was rewarded with the unexpected feeling of the animal guts stacked behind the photographs. In *Hora y media* (*Hour and a Half*), a 1974 installation, Grobet filled a darkened gallery space with unfixed photographs. The lights were turned on after the public assembled, causing the immediate blackening of the photographs.

Some of the Mexican group projects expressed a radical militancy that turned out to be short-lived. In early 1978, various Mexican artists who belonged to Los Grupos tried to create a "Mexican Front of Cultural Workers' Groups" with the (unsuccessful) aim of "joining proletarian and peasant struggles, and gaining control of the means of production and circulation of work."[18]

The groups affiliated with the Front espoused a wide mixture of leftist ideologies and also included a variety of disciplines. The Taller de Arte e Ideología (Art and Ideology Workshop), or TAI, created in 1975, sponsored panel discussions on ideological aspects of art and communication.[19] Their goal was to achieve "the increase of the possibilities of rupture with those ideas, feelings, and perceptions ruled by the ideology of the dominant class."[20]

The No-Grupo (No-Group) primarily challenged the bourgeois art market by analyzing its mechanisms using irony. In one of their performances, they presented a price list for the different handshakes available during an opening (scaled upward from artist to critic to museum director).[21]

A most unexpected feature within the Mexican context was that the groups and the Front promoted pan-Americanism. Preceding movements had primarily focused on Mexico itself and on nation building; this continental focus was a radical departure. The artists wanted to fight the same battles that inspired the original muralist movement, but were eager to do so from different formal premises and without the muralists' dogmatism that now was viewed as obsolete and counterproductive. As it happened, the artists of Los Grupos often focused so much on the didactic functions of their work that the expressive aspect seemed neglected and excessively weakened. Their main contributions were the collective approach they practiced and their effort to bypass conventional artistic venues, something that later got lost. In 1977, four of the groups accepted an invitation to represent Mexico in the Tenth Biennial of Young Artists in Paris. One of them, Grupo Proceso Pentágono, was an enlarged version of the Grupo Pentágono that assembled especially for this occasion. In a public relations coup, they persuaded Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez to write an introduc-

Figure 8.13. Installation by the Grupo Proceso Pentágono for the Tenth Biennial of Young Artists, Paris, 1977. Photo Lourdes Grobet, Archivo del Grupo Proceso Pentágono, courtesy of Víctor Muñoz.

tion for the catalogue. García Márquez defended the artists in what could be seen as a political concession: the participation in a bourgeois exhibition dedicated to reviled forms of art. García Márquez used the old argument that withholding participation would, by default, have turned over the space to their reactionary adversaries.[22]

In their defense, it should be said that, in Mexico, both Los Grupos and the "reactionary adversaries" were operating in the same social space. Meanwhile, in Chile, the situation was quite different. Thanks to the bloody regime of Augusto Pinochet, that social space was clearly divided, and thus the group CADA had an oddly clearer panorama in which to work.

CADA: Colectivo de Acciones de Arte

As Chilean critic Nelly Richard observes, the artists from the Chilean Left had used Salvador Allende's tenure to "illustrate geographical or socio-political con-

text." The art produced later, during Pinochet's regime, would "objectify" these issues and use fragmentary quotes from both the international and national repertoire, transplanting from one into the other.[23] Thus, Carlos Leppe, in his *Acción de la estrella* (*Action of the Star;* 1979), follows Duchamp's example with a tonsure in the shape of a star, but then displays it as taking the place of the one star on the Chilean national flag by sitting behind the corresponding open square.

It is interesting that, compared to the primarily male group of artists who were involved in individualized Latin American conceptualism, both Los Grupos and the Chilean collective CADA (Art Actions Collective) had a balanced-gender membership. And, paradoxically, in Chile it took Pinochet's dictatorship to generate and give shape to the more interesting and militant artistic expressions. Previous artistic events, like *El quebrantahuesos* (*The Bonebreaker*) or the actions by Alejandro Jodorowsky and Enrique Lihn, did not seem to have much influence. There were some other precedents, among them the work of Juan Luis Martínez (1942–1993) and Cecilia Vicuña (1948–), that perhaps dated to the mid-sixties. Martínez was a poet who also explored visual poetry. His poems are broken up with imagery, and his objects bring to mind the work of both Joan Brossa and Joseph Cornell. Vicuña's early work is poorly recorded and mostly reconstructed at much later dates, thus giving more of an insight into her own trajectory than into the development of conceptualism in Chile. Juan Pablo Langlois (1936–) made *Cuerpos blandos* (*Soft Bodies*) in the Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago in 1969, and Vicuña's *Otoño* (*Autumn*) installation was shown in the same museum in 1971. *Cuerpos blandos* was a one-thousand-foot-long piece made of garbage bags filled with newspapers that went through the building and out to the street. *Otoño* consisted of a room full of dried leaves three feet deep. But there was no clear tradition leading to the actions of the late 1970s. In part, this may be due to the fact that immediately before and during the Allende period, artists were less concerned with artistic "rupture" than with the development of a more "popular" aesthetic, something equivalent to that of Mexican muralism and Mexican popular graphics.

During the second half of the 1960s, Vicuña, a poet and a figurative painter, started creating disposable mini-installations that she called "*Precarios*" (*Precarious States*). At the time, however, they were private activities, and they are mostly known today through her recent reconstructions. With six other poets and artists, in 1967 she integrated the Tribu No (No-Tribe). Tribu-No's members had decided that the only option left for South America was to say *no,* and, accordingly, they performed some street actions to spread their message.[24] In spite of their nihilist title, the group mostly advocated love, solidarity, beauty, and social-

ism, and wrote graffiti like: "Read Henry Miller." The actions were classed by some as a symptom of derivation from the U.S. hippy movement rather than as events having local impact.[25]

None of this activity seemed to have a very long-lasting effect, and neither did later imported input during the seventies. Kosuth had visited Chile in 1971, but with no major consequence for the Chilean artists. In a lecture, he made it a point (maybe because of Allende's Chile) to extol conceptual art's "potential revolutionary nature." But then the talk also described conceptual art as a "reflexive critical practice perpetually overviewing and recontextualizing its own history."[26] German happening artist Wolf Vostell (1932–1998) had a major exhibition in 1977, and that seems to have had a much more lasting effect, although it reflected giving a more prominent role to the spectacle format.[27] This very particular panorama may explain why Mari Carmen Ramírez and Chilean critic Justo Pastor Mellado propose José Balmes (1927–) as a protoconceptualist in the Chilean context. Balmes is a painter whose work during the 1960s was closely associated with informalism, and who gave his paintings a political bent by integrating graffiti-like words in his canvases and directing them against different actions of U.S. imperialism.

Censorship during Pinochet's dictatorship was applied much more harshly to the publicity for events than to the events themselves. The dictatorship turned out to be rather unpredictable in its aesthetic judgment. There was no discernible official line. The regime's tolerance in art ran all the way from the most trivial and uninformed taste of the army hierarchy, suddenly self-appointed to make cultural decisions, to the sophisticated cosmopolitan taste of the politically conservative oligarchy. It was a complex situation in which artists had to negotiate a "safe" language. The solution they found was to employ avant-garde formats that were internationally validated. With these formats, they appealed to the snobbery of the more informed factions of the regime, who they hoped would successfully intercede with the philistines in the military. Within the safer formal boundaries, they then developed and codified ambiguity to both disguise and promote their content.[28] The work was acceptable as long as the regime believed that it was elitist enough to be inaccessible to the masses. One of the recipes for success was to avoid any formal solution employed in the popular art created during the Allende period. The big challenge for the artists was to achieve and maintain a level of "clandestine" reading within this very elaborate and complex set of rules.

The group that operated under the name CADA brought all this to fruition. CADA was the more militant group in what was known as the Escena de Avan-

zada (Advance Scene) artists, active during the late 1970s and early 1980s in Chile. The acronym CADA stands for Colectivo de Acciones de Arte (Art Actions Collective). In Spanish, the word "*cada*" also means "each," an example of the ambiguity they favored. The members of this diverse group were the artists Lotty Rosenfeld (1943–) and Juan Castillo (1952–), the sociologist Fernando Balcells (1950–), the poet Raúl Zurita (1950–), and the novelist Diamela Eltit (1949–).

The group started in 1979 and tried to work outside the existing art institutions. It sought to make direct appeals to the public at large. When they did use public exhibition spaces, they did so in a format that tightly conformed to their own program. One of their most typical works was their first, called *Para no morir de hambre en el arte* (*Not to Die of Hunger in Art*), performed on October 3, 1979. As a first step, the artists distributed milk in a shantytown, later reclaiming the containers to use for works to be exhibited. Then they secured a page in the magazine *Hoy*, which they left blank except for a few captions. They had wanted to leave the page completely empty, but had to bow to the magazine's demand for at least some text. The text they used was:

> imagine this page completely blank
> imagine this page white like the milk daily consumed
> imagine every corner of Chile deprived of
> daily milk like white pages to be filled[29]

The reluctance to include the text came from a fear of redundancy. The whiteness of the page was to lead the reader/viewer to imagine milk and shortages (and, of course, the hand of power present in censorship). A second component was the reading of a text, "No es una aldea" (It Is Not a Village), in front of the United Nations building in Santiago, and ideally also in Bogotá and Toronto[30] in the five languages used by the United Nations.[31] Finally, in a gallery in Santiago, they exhibited one hundred reclaimed milk containers stamped with "1/2 liter milk," in reference to a slogan of the Allende government to guarantee a minimum of nutrition for every child, and worked on by other artists.[32] The milk containers, together with the tape of "It Is Not a Village" and the page from *Hoy*, were exhibited in a sealed acrylic display case, which prevented the smell of the rotting milk from entering the gallery space. On

Figure 8.14. CADA, *Invasión de escena* (*Scene Invasion*), 1979. Courtesy of Lotty Rosenfeld.

Figure 8.15. CADA, *Invasión de escena* (*Scene Invasion*), 1979. Courtesy of Lotty Rosenfeld.

October 17, eight milk trucks paraded through town, going from the dairy to the Museum of Fine Arts along a planned route. The trucks were then parked in front of the museum. When the trucks arrived, the entrance to the museum was blocked with one hundred square meters of white fabric, its whiteness also a reference to milk.[33] After the event, realizing the nature of the project that had taken place, the company that supplied the trucks, Soprole, changed the logotype on its vehicles in an effort to distance itself from the event's message.[34]

The milk event was extended to other countries, not only with the reading of the text in front of UN buildings, but with Chilean artists living in exile who were invited to join by performing related activities in their new countries of residence. CADA 's plan included "a glass of milk spilled under the blue sky." Thus, Cecilia Vicuña, who at the time lived in Bogotá, spilled a glass seemingly containing milk onto the street by pulling it down with a red cord. The action was announced all over the city with posters set in bullfight-poster typography. The opportunity also served to denounce corruption in Colombia, where milk given to children in areas of extreme poverty had allegedly been adulterated. To this effect, Vicuña used white vinyl glue instead of real milk. In Canada, artist Eugenio Téllez drank a glass of milk while he read a text in front of Toronto's city hall.[35] For the group, the international networking of these relatively slim activities was much more important than the events themselves.

In 1981, the group performed another action, *Ay Sudamérica* (*Oh South America*), during which six planes were used to throw 400,000 flyers over the poor neighborhoods of Santiago "as a quote of the bombing of the government palace that signaled the fall of the democratic government headed by Salvador Allende . . . [and] to reconstruct the political trauma of 1973."[36] The flyers had a text that finished with: ". . . every man who works for the enlargement—even if only a mental one—of his living spaces is an artist."[37] Surprisingly, the group was granted permission for their project by the government. One of the packages of flyers didn't open, and when it fell on the roof of a police station, it made a big hole. The group had to pay for the repairs, but didn't suffer any further consequences.

The members of CADA did not limit themselves to collective work. Lotty Rosenfeld tampered with road markings using broad white tape to design plus and minus signs that confused drivers (1982–1985), and Raúl Zurita used an airplane to write his poems in the sky (1982). Zurita, together with another member of CADA, Diamela Eltit, also did performances that involved acts of self-mutilation. Chilean critic Nelly Richard noted that these actions were "as if the self-inflicted marks of chastisement on the artist's body reflected the marks of suffering on the national body, as if pain and its subject could unite in the same scar."[38] What Richard is remarking on is something that distinguished CADA's work from earlier mutilation/flagellation pieces by Gina Pane, Chris Burden, the Viennese artists, and others. In their work, self-mutilation, even if geared toward social shock (or, in the case of Burden, social participation), remained a mostly personal and artistic expression. In CADA's work, the mutilation seems to have become a metaphor for collective experience.[39]

CADA's attitude was summed up in an interview conducted by critic Nelly Richard in 1982. The words they used, once again, sound familiar: "Our aim is to dissolve art through everyday creativity. We do not want any opposition between art and life. The future we desire for art is life itself, the creation of a different society as a great work of art."[40]

Their last piece, before the group decided to cease doing collective work in 1983, was "*No +*." It coincided with the tenth anniversary of the regime, asked for the collaboration of artists who did not belong to the group, and consisted of graffiti with "No +" as the text. In Spanish, the word for the sign "+" is "*más*," which can be read as "more," so that soon the walls of buildings around Santiago had signs saying things like "no more dictatorship," "no more poverty," and so on. The public assimilation of the work was considered a transmittal of the activity and determined their decision to stop their projects. In retrospect, this

Figure 8.16. CADA, *No + Miedo* (*No + Fear*), 1983. Courtesy of Lotty Rosenfeld.

seems like an unfortunate decision, since this point might have served to further empowerment as a continuing process.[41]

In 1980, and in the same vein of having the public complete thoughts hinted at by an artist, Alfredo Jaar (1956–) filled Santiago de Chile with billboards asking "Are you happy?" Given the atmosphere of terror imposed by the dictatorship, the question was an extremely loaded one and was a good example of "contextual" art. In the Museum of Fine Arts, viewers were stopped and invited to answer the same question for a poll, and this was recorded on videotape. They were given mints that were to be placed into clear plastic containers marked with the possible answers to the question. People also had the choice to abstain, in which case they were allowed to keep the mint and eat it.

EPS Huayco

Meanwhile, in Peru, insurgency prevailed during the same time frame as CADA and Jaar's billboards, 1979–1980. "Shining Path" was the best known of Peru's guerrilla movements, but there were many others, spanning a whole spectrum of leftist ideologies, mixed to different degrees with indigenist causes. Conceptualist strategies were not common in Peru, but one art group, EPS Huayco, did stand out during this period as coming relatively close. This group, though short-lived, made an impact with two actions.[42] EPS stands for "Estética de Proyección

Social" (Social Projection Aesthetics) and plays on the name of a cooperative created by the government of Juan Velasco Alvarado called Empresa de Propiedad Social (Social Property Company).[43] The word "*huayco*" is Quechua for "avalanche." EPS Huayco members gathered ten thousand empty cans of evaporated milk and used them as a composite canvas on which they painted a huge dish with french fries and sausages that was visible from the highway. In a second phase, a year later, they added another two thousand cans and repainted the whole piece with a portrait of Sarita Colonia. Sarita, born Sarita Colonia Zambrano (1914–1940), is a popular cult figure claimed to have performed many miracles among the poor, although there is no concrete information about what those were. At some point in her life, she was apparently stopped by robbers, who, upon finding nothing to steal from her, tried to rape her and discovered that she was like a doll, with nothing between her legs. In spite of the claimed miracles, the Catholic Church did not accept Sarita. She apparently died of malaria and was buried in a common grave. However, as the myth surrounding her grew, the Church made an about-face later and thought it prudent to adopt her as an unofficial saint.

Sarita's portrait was placed on a hill that faces both the city and a heavily traf-

Figure 8.17. Alfredo Jaar, from the *Studies on Happiness* series, 1979–1981: *¿Es usted feliz?* (*Are you happy?*), 1983, billboard. Courtesy of Alfredo Jaar.

Figure 8.18. Alfredo Jaar, from the *Studies on Happiness* series, 1979–1981: *¿Es usted feliz?* (*Are you happy?*), 1983, advertising space on street clock. Courtesy of Alfredo Jaar.

Figure 8.19. EPS Huayco, *Sarita Colonia,* 1980, enamel on tin (ca. 12,000 cans of evaporated milk, 60 square meters). Photo Marianne Ryzek, Archivo de Micromuseo; Gustavo Buntinx, *EPS Huayco: Documentos,* Lima: Museo de Arte de Lima, Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos, Centro Cultural de España en Lima, 2005.

ficked route used by migrant workers. Gustavo Buntinx, who wrote extensively about the work of EPS Huayco, points out that what could aesthetically be classified as a derivation of pop art, here became an icon returned to the people. Offerings to Sarita were brought to the site of the painting, and the work, in Buntinx's words, linked "Andean migrants and radicalized sectors of the middle class in a shared bid for revolutionary power."[44]

One of the influential figures in Huayco ESP was Francisco Mariotti, who was born in Bern (1943), but did his grade school and secondary education in Lima. Later, after studying art in Hamburg and Paris, he participated (together with Klaus Geldmacher) in the Documenta IV international exhibition in 1968. Back in Lima, under the Left-leaning government of Velasco Alvarado, he helped organize silkscreen workshops for peasants. In 1980, Mariotti exhibited his *Reciclajes* (*Recyclings*), installations using materials found in garbage dumps, a show that inspired subsequent actions by Huayco ESP.[45] However, the idea of using empty cans of evaporated milk had been raised a year earlier in a group that partially overlapped with Huayco. Their idea was to make curtains to interfere with traffic in Lima in an operation supporting a general strike.[46]

EPS Huayco also did some poster work, which relied heavily on pop imagery. Soon after, they stopped making collective creations and then disintegrated, completely plagued by internal dissension.

14 *The Markers of Latin American Conceptualism*

It can be said, then, that Latin American conceptualism gets its definition from a confluence and a synthesis of different artistic tendencies rather than from a development of a formalist opposition to styles preceding it. Much of what was going on in the cultural centers was known, even if belatedly. Information that was picked up was considered stimulating when it corresponded to local situations and speculations; other information was only interesting as a matter of gossip. For instance, some mainstream minimalist work could be connected with local constructivist work, whereas pop art, though often appreciated, nevertheless seemed as foreign as it actually was, coming as a reaction to and a continuation of abstract expressionism in the United States. Also, the academic tradition inspired by the French art academy, a tradition much stronger and longer lasting in Latin America than in the United States or Western European countries, conditioned some of the interaction with mainstream developments. It was Paris, not New York, that was seen as the cultural center for a century that reached beyond 1960. And the antidote provided by the Bauhaus, whose exiles went to the United States, reached Latin America slowly and through secondary sources.

The Bauhaus ideas quickly influenced Latin American schools of architecture, both for practicality and for the seduction of the International Style, but were slow in entering fine art schools. For more than half of the twentieth century, there was a strange disconnect between what happened in schools and the innovations contributed from the artists' studios. Thus, the issues and burden of an education based on skills probably left a much bigger mark on the periphery than in the center. The irony of a skill-oriented education is that once those skills are acquired, they are taken for granted. Therefore, for many decades, the making of art tended not to include any substantial experimentation with art materials.

Academic art skills indoctrinated the artist on how to approach reality—skills generally presumed the ability to render it—but they also provided a stable plat-

form. This stability had the advantage of making it easier to introduce a "program." The socialist realist artists, for example, worked within a programmatic extension of the academicism of the nineteenth century. Their artwork did not start with the material execution, but with the illustration or visualization of a program, in this case an ideological political program. Socialist realism closely used what can be called a manifest ideological scaffolding, and in the pecking order used for reading or appreciating a work of art, it was the ideological expression that was put first, while the craft in the execution was a given. So, leaving out the different attitudes in regard to confrontation with the establishment's power, there seems to be a link between conceptualist strategies and socialist realism, a connection that both modernist and postmodernist historical approaches ignore. The taking for granted of the execution gives a certain transparency (dematerialization) to the physical presence of the work. This allows the program (which could be the concept) to come through more directly and with a reduced loss of information.

The obvious limitations that plagued socialist realism came from the lack of freedom afforded by its program and by the narrowness of the skills permitted for the rendering. But there is no concern here for any essence of art, and the intentions in this respect are removed from those in conceptual art and closer to those in Latin American conceptualism.

Modernist artists tended to integrate the struggle with the media into the search for the image. Impressionists, expressionists, and abstract expressionists in particular allowed the medium itself to become an active tool for expression and a communicator. Minimalist artists had a similar attitude when they used industrial finish for their image. Minimalism and expressionism thus are strange bedfellows, sharing a vision in which, as Marshall McLuhan later put it, "the medium is the message."

Expressionism in Latin America, however, did not serve only as a formal style to communicate pathos; it also became a form of protest. It was a way of negating the minimalist industrial finish that was coming from the mainstream.

Mari Carmen Ramírez, who elaborated on an earlier perception of the Spanish historian Simón Marchán Fiz, has described the different identity we can see in the production of conceptualist work in Latin America.[1] Marchán Fiz spoke of an "ideological conceptualism" (1974) that took place in Argentina and Spain. Curiously, he ignored the rest of continental art production, but at least he had the sense to separate Latin American conceptualism from the mainstream.[2] In her work, Ramírez seeks to string together the identifying, generative elements of Latin American conceptualism, and concludes that the movement fits into a

broader Latin American art history. With her insights, she helped me clarify my own ideas on the subject.

In her essay "Blueprint Circuits: Conceptual Art and Politics in Latin America," Ramírez points out the need for a new history of conceptualism in Latin America, and establishes continuity between Mexican muralism and the work of Duchamp. In her view, Mexican muralism is a crucial version of the Latin American artistic avant-garde, and it reinvested painting with social meaning in a parallel fashion to how, later, more contemporary artists reinvested meaning into readymades. Ramírez writes:

> One could argue that if Duchamp's propositions found a fertile ground in Latin America, it was because a refusal to abandon the specificity and communicative potential of the aesthetic object was deeply embedded in the modern art tradition initiated by the Mexican Mural Movement and later embraced by the group of political conceptual artists. However, Duchamp's radical subversion of art as institution, implicit in the provocative creation of the readymade, is reenacted in these artists' work as an ironic tactic aimed at exposing a precarious activity: that of artistic practice in the frequently inoperative conditions of Latin America. Therefore, utilizing the readymade as a "package to communicate ideas" ultimately points to an underlying concern with "devaluation," the loss of the object's symbolic value as a result of any economic or ideological process of exchange (as opposed to the North American artists' preoccupation with the process of commodification). Thus, the acts of "re-insertion" carried out by these artists are intended to reinvest objects with social meaning. The readymade, then, becomes an instrument for the artists' critical intervention in the real, a stratagem by which patterns of understanding may be altered, or a site established for reinvesting reality with meaning. The readymade also turns into a vehicle by which aesthetic activity may be integrated with all the systems of reference used in everyday life.[3]

Thus, Duchamp somehow gave "permission" to use anything, not just art media and forms, as vehicles for expression and communication beyond the limitations of just expressing art. What ultimately matters is the relation art has with everyday life as affected by these political antecedents. In Ramírez's view, Duchamp tried to challenge the art-as-an-institution model by introducing readymades. With them, he made the autonomy of art relative and allowed for other connections to and within "reality."

However briefly, the Mexican muralists broke down this same autonomy by deciding that the greatest importance was to be given to political communication. But most of these attempts to modify, if not abolish, art-as-we-know-it have been utopian and short lived. All these efforts were invariably neutralized because, no matter how inartistic, they ended up being classified as a form of art, a process of co-optation in which I may regretfully be involved as well when I discuss the Tupamaros in this book. The Mexican muralists recognized the dangers of a commodified society unremittingly institutionalizing art. Devaluation of the material aspects of the work of art affected its potential ownership. This was not a casual by-product; ownership was radically questioned and invalidated, and the relations between art and social class were a major concern. Conceptualism in Latin America introduced the idea of art as a public domain, something the Mexican muralists had discussed but did not solve. Shifting from easel painting to muralism was, essentially, an expropriation of the art object in the name of the public, but the object was still there and still subject to institutional power plays. The move by the Mexicans lacked the force and radical quality of the new approach, but it was perceived by the muralists themselves as a great and perhaps even as the ultimate conquest. Siqueiros, visiting Uruguay in February of 1933, yelled to the expectant and somewhat puzzled group of friends and admirers waiting for him on the tarmac: "Down with easel painting!" [4]

The problem with Mexican muralism was that it gave mixed messages. The content of the murals was designed to liberate the oppressed. Meanwhile, the murals continued to operate as a form of visual oppression—if anything, in a much more potent way than previous art. In the museums, one at least has a choice to go or not to go, to look or to walk by. With the murals, one is trapped. And then, ownership had not really been abolished; it had only been transferred to the state. Later conceptualist work, noncollectible because it was dematerialized, was presumed to be literally impossible to "own" and thereby resistant to elitist exclusivity. This presumption, of course, proved wrong. The elite now love to collect the material bits and pieces that are left. Still, the approach of the conceptualists was at least consistent with the idea current in radical politics of the 1960s: that art things should belong to the people at large, and in this dream they were linked to the Mexican muralists. In 1921, Siqueiros, in a manifesto for the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors, had written:

> Our fundamental aesthetic goal is to socialize artistic expression. . . . The creators of beauty should apply their greatest energies to [produce] work of ideological value for the people, so that the final goal of art, which now

is an expression of individualistic masturbation, may be an art for all, of education and of battle.[5]

This statement could equally have been written four decades later, and with the same intensity, for the issue in the 1960s (and still today) is the conundrum of individual contemplation versus collective education. Conceptualism in Latin America sought to continue both.

Sometimes, as in the case of Siqueiros, the impatient answer to the limits of their form of politicized art was to drop out of art completely, at least for a while. Siqueiros used his leave of absence to focus purely on politics so that he could seek redress for society in a more expedient manner, an expediency reflected in his assassination attempt on Leon Trotsky in 1924.[6] It is interesting that throughout his life Siqueiros maintained a longing for "pure art." "Pure" meant nondescriptive and without any utilitarian or political purpose. He believed pure art was possible, but only when class struggle and an egalitarian society were able to function without hierarchical institutions. Until then, however, the fight must go on and was of primary importance, thus art had to remain as politicized as possible.[7] For Siqueiros, however, constrained as he was by his historical placement, politicized art was reduced to content and mural presentation.

The Tupamaros were clearly placed within this same project of challenging institutions by merging creativity into the activities of "normal" everyday life, but they carried the consequences to an extreme. The group tried to set the conditions for a life in which creativity could take place, and in which the co-optation that is unavoidable in the long run is at least delayed as long as possible. As Cuban critic Abdel Hernández pointed out, the art/life binomial eventually always produces the author/hero binomial.[8] It follows, then, that the healthy aim is to increase the number of authors so that fewer heroes are needed.

Re-signification and contextualization were interesting tools because they allowed artists to deal with content, especially political content, without having to engage in storytelling and thus run the risk of degenerating into illustration. Before that, and until the early 1960s, political issues in art had been confined to content. The art object was permitted to "describe" politics—an activity usually despised by the art world—or to function as a cultural symptom of class interests. But, no matter how militant the artist, the art object could not *be* political action because then it would cease to exist as art. Art and politics appeared to be subject to an irreversible division of labor. In regard to this division (art as a form of knowing life), Soviet theorist Nikolai Chuzhak once wrote: "A method of knowing life . . . is the highest content of the old bourgeois aesthetics." And in

opposition, he called for “Art as a method of building life—this is the slogan behind the proletarian conception of the science of art.”[9]

In her approach, Ramírez underlines readymades and takes the dematerialization process of the artwork to a secondary place in relation to the re-signification of the object. This gives the activity of the artist a magisterial quality that is not normally expected from someone who is confined to the exercise of a craft. But it also underlines and raises the symbolic value and importance of non-art objects. Objects become symbols of property, status, and power and, when imported, of foreign presence. As a consequence, one sees, for example, how the weight of the *insertion* pieces by Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles (particularly the Coca-Cola bottles with decals bearing political messages) changes according to where the action takes place.

Place therefore is not a sterile physical location but a context. It acts like a frame that not only introduces different readings into objects, but also gives a political signification to the style of expression. An imported visual solution used for a work of art dramatically alters one’s understanding of the piece from what it would have been if a local solution had been used. This *import quality,* the imported look, is often used on the periphery to validate a work of art. This look is seen as evidence of “trend awareness,” which is understood to be a sign of refinement. Moreover, the import quality also introduces several less tangible atmospheric conditions, like the mythical dimensions of a decadent and unreachable sophistication, or industrialist nostalgia about how an idealized technology might rule a society. These are part of many vicarious experiences typical of the periphery. It is a process one can also clearly see in the use of borrowed symbolic values that appear in architectural products like churches, banks, government buildings, and mansions where the aim is to express affluence. This dependence on borrowed symbols has changed little since early in the colonial period. Borrowing (as different from appropriation) poses problems for art historians and critics, for it occurs in the service of different objectives. One use may be read as simply a sign of submission to an imported style; another could be read as a co-optation that breathes new life through a form of recycling. Both will ultimately be absorbed into local culture and appropriated, and then the task of disentangling can be difficult and sometimes feel like a waste of time.[10] Viewed politically, borrowing internationally threatens the authenticity of the *local.* It promotes aesthetics conceived in a different cultural context and therefore forces the serving of interests that don’t have any parallel in local society. In this sense, borrowing undermines identity.

Ramírez differentiates Latin American conceptualism in its commitment to

social change from what she calls the "reductionist posture of the then dominant, empirical-positivist model, exemplified by Kosuth's 'art-as-idea-as-idea.'"[11] This is helpful not only because it provides a framework with which to organize our understanding of conceptualism in Latin America, but also because it provides a lens with which to see something that otherwise might be missed: that the European precursors of mainstream conceptualism were also, but in different ways, precursors or progenitive forces in Latin America.

Duchamp's work, for example, can be seen as closer to Latin American conceptualism than to the conceptualism of the mainstream. His intention was not to lay down aesthetic rules over reality, nor to participate in generating further isms based on re-perceiving art in relation to reality. He was interested in resignifying meaning without altering the object. It is only logical, then, that dematerialization as it appears in Latin America had as its primary motive the wish to affect the context in which a work of art was to operate. There was much less interest in a quasi-mystical search for the essence of art, undertaken by lonely and enlightened individuals.

Dematerialization was a form of applied economics in that it allowed for an inexpensive mode of art production. It also proved effective in addressing a primary concern of Latin American artists: the search to invent formats for sharing power: in art, with the viewer; in politics, with the citizens. In fact, what is crucial here is that at this point viewer and member of society became one and the same, with an emphasis on citizenry. Dematerialization offered a way of minimizing the physical presence of an art object without diminishing the human response to it. Focus could be shifted from the "thing" itself to the interaction between artist, object, and viewer. Eliminating materials in this context was not a goal but rather a strategy, and as such, it avoided doctrinal rigidity.

What really mattered to Latin American conceptualists was the growth of freedom in decision. At the risk of oversimplifying, I would say that in the mainstream, the art object was on a road that went from the museum to the patent office. Meanwhile, in Latin America, it was going from the museum to the militant version of an educational institution.

. . . . . .

There are two aesthetic-philosophical means understood to describe mainstream conceptualism, notably, the *elimination of visuality* and the *mapping of the linguistic model onto the perceptual model.*[12] In Latin American conceptualism, they were by and large secondary to a drive for a more efficient communication of specific

ideas. These strategies were used, but without a formalist rigor. The emphasis on rigor was instead applied to contriving interactions with the public. The *elimination of visuality* proved a great tool with which to heighten the awareness of context. *Linguistic mapping*, focusing on the content of the message, helped create a "grammatical" analysis of visual communication as well as provide a base for the preparation of manifestos and ideological documents. It called attention to the possibilities of tautology, without necessarily requiring reduction of work to only words.[13]

A third marker of conceptualism was the *spatialization of language*, where the words composed the space determined by the limit of the page or of the wall. The control of spatialization was used in Latin America to keep the focus on the content and its evocations. It was a product of analysis in Simón Rodríguez's writings and, when used later by the concrete poets, it was a formalist instrument. Conceptualists in Latin America moved between these two poles.

The use of words and tautological turns was already in place in eighteenth-century colonial painting and poetry. In painting, they cohabited happily with figuration and introduced both poetic elements and clarity into communication.[14] The hybridization with poetry, however, is heresy in the mainstream. Buchloh, for instance, has written that the poetic element

> disfigures the precision with which Conceptual artists intervened with the means of language in the conventions of visuality.[15]

And, in 1969, Kosuth happily spoke of "the decline of poetry" and blamed poetry for "the use of common language attempting to say the *unsayable*."[16]

Generally speaking, such disfiguration and attempt to express the unsayable does not particularly upset Latin American artists. As we have seen, many entered the visual arts from poetry or, rather, expanded poetry into the visual arts. This same phenomenon occurred in Europe and can be seen in the work of two of the most interesting European artists of the second half of the twentieth century: Joan Brossa (1919–1998) from Catalonia, and Marcel Broodthaers (1924–1976) from Belgium. It is possible that different perspectives on the use and role of language lie at the heart of the divergence between Latin American and mainstream conceptualism. Mainstream conceptualism sought a form of analysis that has a lot in common with science. As Edward Wilson describes it: "The cutting edge of science is reductionism, the breaking apart of nature into its natural constituents."[17]

Wilson makes it clear that the search is not for simplicity as such, but to find "points of entry into otherwise impenetrable complex systems." The wish to

search for an understanding of complex systems is probably shared by artists and intellectuals all over the world. The definition of what constitutes a (complex) system and what designates its "constituent" parts is debatable, and that is where the use of language as a shared platform is a two-edged sword. It facilitates communication and research, but at the same time it imposes imperceptible limits on the imagination. In science, reductionism seems to be a crucial tool in the search for final theories, but in art, it may lead to skeletons devoid of the flesh of mystery.

In conceptualism, language can be viewed as a constituent part of a complex system that has the power to serve as a tool for analysis of that system.[18] Or it can serve as a vehicle for altering the system by creating new forms of consciousness in tension with the existing system. Poetry falls into the second category, and it is in that dimension that language became critical to Latin American conceptualism.

ples, points out: "I have never seen a worker take off to [organize a rally on the] Plaza de Mayo after seeing [an abstract] painting by Lozza, but I did see the petite bourgeoisie thrilled by [political and realistic work] by Berni and Castagnino without interruption since the 1950s" (personal communication, June 18, 2001).

4. Grippo's work is actually a transition piece between the more politically active production of the generation of the 1960s and the more identity-oriented work that was produced during the decades following.

5. Grippo, *Victor Grippo*, 49.

Chapter 3

1. See Buchloh, "Buchloh Replies," 160–161.

2. Mas'ud Zavarzadeh's use of the term "intelligibility effect" as "a historical understanding of the material processes and contradictory relations through which the discourses of culture make sense" illustrates this point ("Theory as Resistance," 50).

3. For a discussion on the subject, see Buchloh et al., "Conceptual Art and the Reception of Duchamp," a discussion between Benjamin Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss, Thierry de Duve, Martha Buskirk, Alexander Alberro, and Yves Alain-Bois.

4. An interesting reverse example is that of Rudolf Borchardt (1877–1945), a German poet and translator who around 1910 decided that Dante should have written the *Divine Comedy* in German rather than in Italian. Borchardt translated Dante's work into archaic medieval German, describing his position thus: "The genuine archaism intervenes in history after the fact, and forces it at will to change for the duration of the work of art, dismisses from the past whatever is not needed, and creatively surrogates out of its feeling for the present whatever it needs . . ." (letter to Josef Hofmiller, February 1911, cited by George Steiner in *After Babel*, 339). I was directed to this quotation while reading Amos Elon's *The Pity of It All*.

5. George Brecht was skeptical about his work fitting into conceptual art because he was interested in a "total experience." His doubts only make sense within the narrow confines of U.S. conceptualism, and it is no surprise that he moved to Europe. U.S. conceptualism concerned itself more with rules derived from the geographical area in which the art game itself was taking place.

6. Applying this point to an analysis of the early twentieth century in Latin America, Mari Carmen Ramírez goes as far as to talk of "ex-centric avant-gardes." The term is used to denote the absence of the European conditions for the traditional avant-garde, in which art had separated from and reached an autonomy and alienation from everyday life. Avant-garde artists (according to Peter Bürger) attacked the function of art as an institution in bourgeois society. In Latin America, with an ill-defined bourgeois society and a lack of the European infrastructure that nurtured the arts, the equivalent process was full of contradictions and paradoxes, leading to idiosyncratic results. David Alfaro Siqueiros, for example, would call for a reintegration "of those values that had disappeared from painting and sculpture while adding new values," when trying

to build the institution of art. Joaquín Torres-García would seek *tradition* as a reference to achieve the ruptures needed in his own present (Ramírez, "El clasicismo dinámico," 132).

Chapter 4

1. Art & Language group's (April 1968) response to Lucy Lippard and John Chandler's "Dematerialization of Art," published in Lippard, *Six Years*, 43.

2. The quote is taken from the catalogue, which is made up of unnumbered index cards, for the exhibition 2,972,453.

3. "Manifestos focus on the construction of an enemy; . . . more than setting a position, a manifesto seeks to set an opposition" (Cippolini, *Manifiestos argentinos*, 17).

4. Shifra Goldman made this point to me after reading an early draft of this text.

5. Rizzo, *Instituto Di Tella*, 42–43.

6. Jacoby, "Después de todo," 34–35.

7. Masotta, "Después del Pop," 335. El Lissitsky's thesis was that each technological improvement led to a diminution of materials and an increase in "liberated energy."

8. Longoni and Mestman, *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán arde,"* 75.

9. Lamelas, "Self-awareness," 386 (emphasis in original).

10. In conceptualist terms, one could say that the difference between Peter Rubens's way of painting and that of Leonardo da Vinci or any other "old master" is found in their different control of clumsiness and how they hide their mistakes. Being neither one better or worse than the other, that difference defines their signature way of painting. In any masterly painting, there is a redirection of information to hide the erosion of information and to create a new totality that seems perfect. Painting with a signature style becomes a form of calligraphy, but the loss is still there.

11. Suárez, "Carta a Romero Brest," May 13, 1968, cited in Cippolini, *Manifiestos argentinos*, 367–368.

12. This attitude has somewhat changed in recent years, and a prime symptom of this change is the market success of Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn.

13. In 1970, Kosuth, speaking about himself and about North American conceptualism, wrote: "At its most strict and radical extreme the art I call conceptual is such because it is based on an inquiry into the nature of art. Thus, it is not just the activity of constructing art propositions, but a working out, a thinking out, of all the implications, of all aspects of the concept 'art'. . . The audience of conceptual art is composed primarily by artists—which is to say that an audience separate from the participants doesn't exist. . . . *Fundamental to this idea of art is the understanding of the linguistic nature of all art propositions, be they past or present, and regardless of the elements used in their construction*" (*sic;* Kosuth, "Introductory Note by the American Editor," *Art & Language* 1, no. 2, 3, 53–62; emphasis in original). It is interesting how here the linguistic aspect is coupled with elitism.

14. The show was organized as a homage to Kynaston McShine's Primary

Structures exhibition in the Jewish Museum in New York in 1966.

15. During the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, Latin American artists who worked in Paris would often title their pieces in French. This was done for local consumption in their countries, to proclaim a presumed higher status given by foreign studies. Today we are reaching a universal acceptance of English as a condition for sales. A good example of a complete sacrifice of identity was given by the advertisement of the dubbed version of the movie *Life Is Beautiful*, made after it earned the Oscar. In the ad, Roberto Benigni appears saying: "I used to say: 'Buongiorno Principessa!' Now I say: 'Hello Princess!'" (*New York Times*, September 1, 1999, E2).

16. Taylor, "Two Visual Excursions," first published in *Critical Inquiry* (September 1974), and reprinted in Mitchell, *The Language of Images*, 25–36. In the same book is an essay by Elizabeth Abel, "Redefining the Sister Arts: Baudelaire's Response to Delacroix," 37–58, with a case study about poetic relations.

17. Taylor, "Two Visual Excursions," 33.

18. There are, of course, more subcategories to be found among the analogues, including psychoanalysis and phenomenology.

Chapter 5

1. Rodríguez, "Reflexiones," 1:195–222. Rodríguez was consistently against slavery and racism and saw the United States of his time as highly hypocritical in its proclamation of freedom while it was taking segregation and slavery for granted.

2. Joseph Lancaster (1778–1838) was interested in teaching the poor and he organized a school in London in 1798. Overwhelmed by the number of students, he developed the monitor system (or, according to some versions, borrowed ideas from Andrew Bell, who had developed a similar system in Madras, India, in 1796). George III gave one hundred pounds to the school and in return demanded biblical studies as a focus. Lancaster used medals for rewards and flogging for punishment. Eventually he was "persuaded" to leave his school due to an accusation of "flogging for personal enjoyment." This led to his emigration to New York in 1817, where he died after being hit by a carriage. The change of names of his organization in England reflects an interesting connection between politics and schooling. After royal funding, in 1808, it became "The Society for Promoting the Royal British or Lancaster System for the Education of the Poor." In 1813, the name was changed to "Lancasterian Institution for Promoting the Education of the Labouring and Manufacturing Classes of Society of Every Religious Persuasion." In 1814, after Lancaster's separation from the institution, it became "The British and Foreign School Society."

3. Bolívar also had pedagogical ideas of his own, for instance: "The study of history, similar to that of languages, should be done starting with the contemporary to then, by degrees, go back to the dark times of fables" (cited by Rojas, *Ideas educativas de Simón Bolívar*, 96).

4. Rodríguez, *Obras completas*, 2:25.

5. Cova, *Don Simón Rodríguez*, 170.

6. Johann H. Pestalozzi (1746–1827) developed his system in Switzerland and, like Lancaster, started with a school for the poor.

7. Rodríguez, *Sociedades americanas, edición facsimilar*. The facsimile reproduces a version printed in 1842; also in *Obras completas*, 1:356.

8. Rodríguez, *Sociedades americanas*, 1:260.

9. Rodríguez, *Tratado sobre las luces*, in *Obras completas*, 2:152.

10. Ibid., 151, 155. This paragraph still seems alive today and, among other things, also sums up the works Argentinean artist León Ferrari (1920–) created between 1962 and 1964, in which he explores the relation of meaning with the distortion of writing. Ferrari's works from this period became very influential for subsequent generations of Latin American conceptualists. The drawings of this period were exhibited under the title of *Politiscripts* in the Drawing Center, New York, in 2004.

11. The word "painting" here refers sometimes to "*pintura*" and sometimes to "*cuadro*," and in the latter is used as a metaphor or as a diagram.

12. Rodríguez, *Tratado*, 2:157. The word "abstraction" is obviously used here in a literal, nonartistic way.

13. Mallarmé, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, 105–106; translated by Mary Ann Caws.

14. Mallarmé, "The Book, a Spiritual Instrument," in ibid., 84.

15. Rodríguez, *Tratado sobre las luces*, in *Obras completas*, 2:183.

16. Cova, *Don Simón Rodríguez*, 14.

17. Morales, *Simón Rodríguez*, 16.

Chapter 6

1. The name "Tupamaros" had a triple reference to (1) Túpac Amaru, the rebellious Inca leader executed by the Spaniards in 1782 in Cuzco, whose real name was José Gabriel Condorcanqui; (2) Uruguayan gauchos fighting for independence from Spanish rule during the early nineteenth century who identified themselves as Tupamaros in honor of Túpac Amaru; and (3) a related song by a group of folksingers (the Olimareños) that was extremely popular at the time of the development of the movement. The name first appeared in a moment of internal rift among the factions forming the MLN in a leaflet titled "T.N.T.," or "Tupamaros No Transamos" (We Tupamaros Do Not Compromise).

2. The Socialist Party had become increasingly an establishment party and no longer fit the views of younger generations who had become more radical. Anarchism in Latin America had arrived through several waves of exiled European anarchists, the last one caused by the defeat of the Spanish Republic by General Francisco Franco. The Cuban Revolution became a big bone of contention for the older anarchists in the Federation, who could not accept the structure of the Cuban government and who were also resentful of Castro's crackdown on Cuban anarchists. Both issues overrode the

possibility of their acceptance of any of the contributions of the revolution. Meanwhile, younger members admired many aspects of the revolution, and this eventually caused the schism.

3. Orlando Bosch, a Cuban exile who later helped plan the explosion of a Cuban passenger plane and presently is living in Florida, boasted of having been the killer of Ramírez in his attempt to kill Guevara.

4. For an inside history of the movement, see Eleuterio Fernández Huidobro, *Historia de los Tupamaros*.

5. "Carta abierta a la policía," *Época* (Montevideo), December 7, 1967, cited in Weinstein, "Decadencia y caída," 93.

6. MLN/Tupamaros, *Actas Tupamaras*.

7. Marighela, *Minimanual*, 11.

8. Author's conversation with a movement leader, December 18, 1994. There was at least one instance in which they could have killed Alejandro Otero, the chief of police intelligence at the time. Otero himself recently acknowledged this in an interview with journalist César Di Candia in *El País* (Montevideo), November 1, 2003.

9. MLN/Tupamaros, *Actas Tupamaras*, 19.

10. Fuerzas Armadas Uruguayas, *Subversión*, 360. The book as a whole seemed amazingly evenhanded in its approach to the history of the Left, so much so that it awakened the interest of the public for the wrong reasons. There were even suspicions that the army had been infiltrated by intellectuals. The book was withdrawn from circulation during the later years of the dictatorship without further explanation.

11. MLN/Tupamaros, "30 preguntas," 22. The concept of "*foco*" espoused by Cuba was also criticized by elements of the guerrilla movement in Venezuela. Douglas Bravo, one of the leaders, criticizes Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution?* for "formulating, not profound analyses, but small recipes, which in part are dogmatic" (Solioni, "Reportaje a Douglas Bravo," 16–18).

12. Debray, *Lezione*, 6.

13. Huelsenbeck, *Dada Almanach*, 6.

14. Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution?* 56.

15. Marighela, *Minimanual*, 33.

16. Debray, *Lezione*, 13.

17. Ibid., 38–39.

18. Author's conversation with a movement leader, September 6, 1993.

19. Author's conversation with a movement leader, December 18, 1994.

20. The concept of "expropriating" banks in Uruguay had a precedent that took place in 1959. The anarchist group that had organized the robbery distributed the money among the needy in the bank's neighborhood. Soon after, police caught them, and the incident was reported as a normal crime devoid of any political connotations.

21. The renunciation of this kind of action by the Tupamaros did not preclude that some years later, in Chile, militant artists belonging to the "Avanzada" movement would carry out similar actions. In the United States, the Black Panthers and the Symbianese Liberation Army used a related model. The ransom for Patty Hearst consisted

of food distribution among the poor and homeless.

22. In an unprecedented move, the government printed a special postage stamp honoring Mitrione. The stamp was for international mail and was withdrawn from circulation soon after its release, thus its existence never became fully known within the country.

23. Fuerzas Armadas Uruguayas, "Normas disciplinarias a cumplir por los reclusos" (Disciplinary Norms to Be Followed by Inmates), May 1976.

24. A witness to the kidnapping of Pereira Reverbel, which occurred while he was entering his dentist's office, commented about a "sensational blonde" that was waiting. She deserved a better and detailed look, and that made him see "that the muscle of the thigh had a rigidity typical for a man . . . Anybody would have been fooled at a first look" (*El Día* [Montevideo], March 31, 1971).

25. Author's conversation with a movement leader, December 18, 1994. The term "Stockholm syndrome" was coined later, in 1973, by Swedish psychologist Nils Bejerot on the occasion of the taking of hostages during the assault of the Kreditbanken in Stockholm. The bank remained occupied from August 23 to 28, 1973, and the hostages developed a friendship with the hostage takers.

26. During the same period, 30 persons died during police interrogation before any indictment could take place, and about 238 were "disappeared." In 2003, the count of the "disappeared" was still open, since police actions also took place in Argentina, Paraguay, and Bolivia, and people are continually added to the list. The groups that are recording family claims only count those victims for whom proof of disappearance can be provided. It is estimated that about 300 Uruguayan citizens "disappeared" outside the country's borders.

27. Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution?* 69.

28. Because the OPR 33 was an independent group within the guerrilla movement, and even though the elections of 2005 put the movement in a prominent position in the new government, the accountability for the flag seems to have been lost.

29. Fuerzas Armadas Uruguayas, *Subversión;* see the chronology, 603–766, a factual and quasi-day-by-day description of Uruguay between 1960 and 1973, focusing on events considered connected with what the army perceived as the subversive Left.

30. MLN/Tupamaros, *Actas Tupamaras,* 137–178.

31. Long after writing this, in a conversation with Mauricio Rosencof, I found out that the "Operación Pando" had been planned by him. Rosencof, who was a well-known playwright and theater director during the 1960s, had smiled benevolently while I described my interpretation of the events from an aesthetic point of view. Confirming my view, he then told me of his part in the event and added some details. The name of the presumed body to be reburied, Burgueño, was taken from the name that appeared most frequently on the tombstones of the Pando cemetery. The cortege format was chosen more because of the difficulty of going to Pando unnoticed if they went as a group larger than needed for theatrical reasons, although the detailed planning of each step obviously had benefited from Rosencof's theatrical experience. Rosencof attributed the military failure of the operation to one single and unforgivable

oversight: they forgot to factor in the radio communication system of police patrol cars (conversations with the author in November 2002).

32. Orthodox guerrilla pundits were not too sympathetic to what was happening on the Uruguayan stage. The Cubans, especially Fidel Castro, were very skeptical about the possibility for success of this type of guerrilla. However, there were several assumptions in Castro's prejudice that did not apply to Uruguay. One of them, avoided by the Tupamaros, was that the leadership of the guerrilla unit would be operating separate from the rest of the members and staying outside the city. In Castro's scenario, they would then lose contact with the cadres. Another assumption was that if there were to be an urban leadership, it would become the equivalent of a "bourgeoisie" within the movement, alienated and inefficient. Still other arguments were based on the difficulty of leading "double" lives, that is, the difficulty of simultaneously being totally underground and above ground, with a lack of appropriate control of activities on both levels. The biggest difference with other guerrilla movements was that the Tupamaros were not interested in a takeover or a grab of power. In that sense, they were acting in a didactic fashion, trying to set the stage for a general strike strong enough to activate a popular takeover. The Tupamaros did not achieve their goal, but the failure is not explained by either Debray's or Castro's arguments, which tend to gloss over different conditions in different countries. One could here refer to both Debray and Castro as part of a "revolutionary mainstream," operating and distorting without an understanding of local conditions. Local conditions in Uruguay included an unusually literate and educated middle class, a relatively flat pampas landscape devoid of woods, and half of the population living in one city.

33. Masliah, "Música popular," 117.

34. The text of this decree was published as an editorial in several issues of the weekly *Marcha* during that year (1973).

35. Schechner, "Six Axioms," 41.

36. The terms "matrixed" and "nonmatrixed" as used in the definition of theatrical events are described by Michael Kirby in "The New Theater," 23–43.

37. Poulantzas, *L'état*, 109.

38. Giddens, *Contemporary Critique*, 244n3. Giddens also speaks about the state monopoly of time and space and uses timetables as an example. This makes one reflect on Benito Mussolini's obsession with the punctuality of trains in Italy during fascism. In this case, they stop being a demagogic service to the people to become a reaffirmation of state control and ownership of the monopoly. Giddens (175–176) mentions the French custom at the turn of the century of having trains arrive five minutes late in relation to the timetable to allow for a more leisurely access. As a third model, possibly one for liberal democracy, one can then take the Long Island Railroad. I believe it was during the late seventies that the authorities of the railroad decided to adjust the published timetables to reflect the inveterate (and apparently reliable) delay of its trains, thus finally being able to print accurate timetables.

39. As Jensen explains in *Le petit livre rouge*: "If during class you are quietly sitting in your place, with an apparently attentive eye and an air of listening, but in fact your

spirit sleeps like a marmot, you are in illegality" (68).

40. I owe this observation to Rachel Weiss.

41. Todd Gitlin, in *The Whole World Is Watching*, traces this "aesthetification for the media" to Jerry Rubin's appearance in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in 1966. R. G. Davis, then director of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, advised Rubin to wear an American Revolution costume. The theory was that the media could not corrupt this image, whereas any spoken declaration of his would be relayed in a distorted form (171). Gitlin, who equates the production of meanings in centralized commercial culture to production of value through labor (with the same lack of control by the people), sees this relation with the media as a factor that contributed to the demise of the New Left: "The media spotlight brought the incandescent light of social attention and then converted it to the heat of reification and judgment" (246).

Abbie Hoffman, who staged the New York Stock Exchange event of August 24, 1968, throwing two hundred one-dollar bills among the stock runners and creating havoc by stopping the Stock Exchange activities for six minutes, took a more sophisticated route with the media: "I waited until the camera was on me while I was talking, and near the end of my rap I mouthed some words soundlessly, putting in the word "fuck" for those who were up to a little lip reading," thus suggesting censorship (Hoffman, "America," 141). Lionel Stander, in his declarations to HUAC on May 6, 1953, had set a precedent for Abbie Hoffman's actions: "Mr. Velde, I would like it very much if you turned off the lights and discontinued the television cameras, as I am a professional performer and I only appear on TV for entertainment or for philanthropic organizations, and I consider this a matter that doesn't fall into either category" (cited in Bentley, *Are You Now . . . ?* 58). Stander was able to use the dynamics of the committee to his advantage, appropriating the setting to make it his own stage and indicting the members of the HUAC in the process.

42. Benjamin, "Work of Art," 242.

43. Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," 91.

44. Padín, "El arte," 30.

Chapter 7

1. Kaprow, "Notes," 11–12.

2. Kaprow, "Artist," 50.

3. Bürger, "Theory and History," 49. This process, to a certain extent, caused the break in 1952 between lettrists and the Internationale Lettriste, whose members later became situationists. The new group, headed by Guy-Ernest Debord, gave its farewell to the lettrists, whose leader was Isidore Isou, with a revealing statement, part of which I used at the beginning of this book: "We say good-bye to Isou, who believed in the usefulness of leaving tracks. Anything that keeps something upright contributes to the work of the police" (cited in Ohrt, *Phantom Avantgarde*, 61).

4. Bürger, "Theory and History," 47.

5. When Martin Luther King organized the Civil Rights March in 1963, he chose Birmingham, Alabama (against other cities suggested by his advisers), because the march would play out more prominently in the media than in the actual location and thus would acquire the characteristics of a spectacle.

6. Rizzo, *Instituto Di Tella.*

7. Ibid., 61.

8. Sueldo, Andino, and Sacco, *Tucumán arde*, 53.

9. Glusberg, Introduction to *Estructuras Primarias II*, n.p.

10. Carnevale, "La comunidad inconfesable," 12.

11. Thesis of the 1964 FRIP congress, cited in Seoane, *Todo o nada*, 323n47.

12. Sueldo, Andino, and Sacco, *Tucumán arde*, 60.

13. Ibid., 57, citing Renzi.

14. Ibid., 60.

15. The name "Tucumán arde" was given by Margarita Paksa, who based it on the title "Paris Is Burning."

16. The Premio Braque was an event sponsored by the French embassy that took place in the Museum of Fine Arts in Buenos Aires. That year the director of the museum had decided to reserve the right to introduce "changes" in works deemed offensive.

17. Juan Pablo Renzi to Graciela Sacco in a conversation repeated by the latter to the author.

18. Favario joined the ERP in 1969 and died in 1975, when the army shot him in a training camp conducting shooting practice. Tucumán Arde was a collective, and therefore partly an anonymous operation. The following artists were among those involved in the implementation of the project: from Buenos Aires: Beatriz Balbé, Roberto Jacoby, and León Ferrari; from Santa Fe: Graciela Bortchwick, Jorge Cohen, and Jorge Conti; and from Rosario: Eduardo Favario, Osvaldo Boglione, Aldo Bortolotti, Nora de Schork, Graciela Carnevale, Noemí Escandell, Rodolfo Elizalde, Emilio Ghilioni, Marta Greiner, Rubén Naranjo, Roberto Puzzolo, Juan Pablo Renzi, María Teresa Gramuglio, María de Arechavala, Estela Pomerantz, Nicolás Rosa, José Lavarello, Edmundo Giura, Carlos Schork, David de Nully Braun, Roberto Zara, Oscar Bidustwa, Raúl Pérez Cantón, Sara López Dupuy, and Jaime Rippa (Sueldo, Andino, and Sacco, *Tucumán arde*, 64). See also Ameijeiras and Farina, "La muestra 'Tucumán arde,'" 28–29.

19. Carlos Basualdo, interview with Rubén Naranjo, Rosario, February 21, 1992.

20. Carnevale, "La comunidad inconfesable," 12. Carnevale, who deeply suffered the conundrums of returning to art on a more modest scale, also remarks: "Today my utopia is small. It lacks the heroism of the 60s," and defines the aesthetic experience as an experience of permanent questioning.

21. Rosa, *La Maga*, 29.

22. Sacco, interview, February 1991.

23. Coordinating Committee of the Revolutionary Imagination, "Argentine Subversive Art," 100.

24. Ferrari, "Tucumán arde," a mimeographed paper in which he answered ques-

tions from the Escuela de Letras, University of Havana.

25. Renzi, “Panfleto #3.”

26. Ibid. The “official channels like this one” refers to the use of Glusberg’s CAYC as an exhibition forum for his statement.

27. Cited in Giunta, “Destrucción-creación,” 73. The letter is the already cited one of May 13, 1968, from Pablo Suárez to Romero Brest, intended to be exhibited as a work of art in the Institute.

28. The Korean Min Joong (“people’s art”) movement of the early 1980s is generally seen in mainstream art history as advocating a realist (if not a quasi–socialist realist) aesthetic. In fact, the “peoples’ art” movement was not so much the result of an aesthetic theory as of a strategic approach to the political realities in Korea at the time. The artists combined aesthetics with popular dynamics of political dissent to achieve their purpose. Their realistic images were not an aesthetic statement, but props in a complex choreography of masses of people. Many of their exhibitions were censored by institutions or the government because, having statements unsympathetic toward the United States, they were considered “impure” and therefore invalid art. Sung Wankyung, “From the Local Context,” 1.

Chapter 8

1. All the information about this work is taken from Giunta, “Destrucción-creación,” 76–79. The artists that authored the piece were Perla Beneviste, Eduardo Leonetti, Juan Carlos Romero, and Edgardo Vigo.

2. Kovacic, “Dos décadas,” 37.

3. “*Siluetazo*” can be translated as a blow made with a silhouette.

4. Amejeiras, “Este año se cumple,” 10–11.

5. Cerisola, “Aparición con vida,” 259–288.

6. The organizers of these actions were two Peruvian-born artists, Fernando Bedoya and Emei, who had also been active in the previous events of the 1980s.

7. Sacco, “De ‘Tucumán Arde’ al ‘Ready-made social,’” typescript, 1989.

8. Bruscky was actually jailed three times: in 1968, 1973, and 1976—all related to matters of cultural freedom of expression. Osthoff, “From Mail Art to Telepresence,” 263.

9. Argañaraz, “Arte Correo,” 10.

10. Ibid., 9.

11. Padín, “El UNI/vers de Guillermo Deisler.” Deisler had been arrested in Chile in 1973 and was allowed to go into exile in France in 1974; he then moved to Bulgaria and later to what was East Germany.

12. Pontes, “Xerografía,” 40.

13. Padín, “Arte Postal,” 3–4. This article first appeared as a paper presented in 1988 at a meeting of Latin American Studies departments of Mexican and U.S. universities on the Pacific coast at the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California at Mexicali.

14. Within the Cuban environment, some of the articles were considered extremely acid. Alejandro López, for example, discusses the case of an artist who calculated and concluded that, of all the time available, he only used about 0.9 percent for artistic creation. Sleep and rest to replenish energy, blackouts, daily chores, bureaucratic processes needed to buy things, and so on take up the rest. To prove that it is possible to do art with even less time, he promises that he will try to bring the time down to 0.3 percent on the occasion of the impending "Day of Culture." Bruguera, *Memoria*, 10.

15. The three people were Humberto Nilo, director of the School of Fine Arts of the University of Chile, who organized the exhibition; Rosario Letelier, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art; and Ernesto Muñoz, curator of the exhibition. http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Atrium/2759/call01.htm

16. Grobet and Muñoz, *Grupo Pentágono*.

17. The performance was the idea of Fernando Leal, a painter and director of one of the centers, who had connections with a circus. I thank Víctor Muñoz for sharing this information with me.

18. Eder, "El arte público en México," v.

19. Goldman, *Dimensions of the Americas*, 123–139.

20. Statement in the catalogue for the Tenth Biennial of Young Artists, Paris, 1977, unpaginated.

21. "No-Grupo," 34.

22. Thirteen years later, in 1990, the U.S. collective Grand Fury faced a similar conundrum when invited to show in the Venice Biennial, but they chose to use a more aggressive and effective strategy. The group planned to translate their politics into Italian reality and worked on a show with the title The Pope and the Penis to be developed through public billboards and an installation in the Biennial. Attempts to stop the project, including holdups in customs and threats of resignation by the director of the Biennial, failed thanks to the enormous publicity the attempted censorship generated. The work took place, enhanced by an enormous amount of discussion. Richard Meyer, "This Is to Enrage You," 74–77.

23. Richard, "Problematic," 86–87.

24. De Zegher, *The Precarious*.

25. Tribu-No included Oscar Hahn, Gonzalo Milán, Claudio Bertoni, Marcelo Charlín, Miguel Vicuña, and Coca Roccatagliatta. In 1969, Claudio Bertoni and Cecilia Vicuña went to visit Henry Miller in California.

26. Kosuth, "Painting Versus Art," 92.

27. Vostell exhibited in the Galería Época in Santiago de Chile in October 1977. I owe this information to Nury González. In 1981, members of CADA visited Vostell in Germany and discussed their works with him. Neustadt, *CADA DÍA*, 41n45.

28. Nelly Richard refers to this as a "buoyancy of meaning" in "Problematic," 31.

29. Neustadt, "El grupo CADA: Acciones," www.casa.cult.cu/revistas/conjunto/127/neustadt.htm

30. Cecilia Vicuña was in Bogotá, and Eugenio Téllez was in Toronto.

31. The text starts with "It is not a village from where we speak, it is only that, a place where the landscape, like the mind and life, are spaces to be corrected." After a poetic analysis of marginality and hunger in Chile, the statement expands to the world: "Today, here, the sky we see is looked at from the garbage, not from the towers of Manhattan or Stockholm. But it is the same sky and collective construction of its meaning that will also be the construction of the sky of Bolivia, of Paraguay, the sky of Zaire, of Bangladesh, of Greece. It will also be the sky of Nagasaki, of the USA, of Brazil, of the USSR, of India, of Norway, of Mexico. Someday this life shall be a decent life" (reprinted in Neustadt, *CADA DÍA*, 128).

32. Neustadt, "El grupo CADA: Lo visual."

33. Lotty Rosenfeld, personal communication, June 7, 2005. However, Rosenfeld explains that "the white that closed the museum signaled that the art was outside, diluted in the city, clandestine." See also Richard, "Dimension," 54–55.

34. Neustadt, *CADA DÍA*, 31.

35. Neustadt, "El grupo CADA: Lo visual."

36. Lotty Rosenfeld, personal communication, June 7, 2005.

37. Richard, "Dimension," 54–55.

38. Richard, "Dimension," 68. Jacqueline Barnitz explains the tolerance of the Pinochet regime toward these normally disruptive events with the argument that the group was not considered radical enough by the Left, and it was ostracized by the establishment, so it was seen as marginal ("Conceptual Art," 44).

39. Zurita is now acclaimed as one of the best Chilean novelists, recipient of several national awards. His self-mutilations are not that clearly a collective issue. In 1975, he publicly burned his face with a hot iron. Meanwhile, Eltit, also a famous novelist, in the early 1980s would go to "whorehouses, jails, and hospitals she designated as 'zones of pain'" and read fragments from the novel *Por la patria* (*For the Fatherland*) she was writing at the time. Landaeta and Lira, "Espíritus transgresores."

40. Richard, *La tercera de la hora*, 82n2.

41. Rosenfeld and Eltit did one last piece in 1985, *Viuda* (*Widow*), catalogued by some as a CADA work (the other members were out of the country at the time). With the collaboration of Gonzalo Muñoz, Paz Errázuriz, and the Agrupación de Mujeres por la Vida (Women for Life Group), they published the face of a woman in several publications, always giving it the caption "Widow." A text was published with the picture: "We bring, then, an anonymous face, whose strength of identity is that it bears the drama of continuing to live in a land where the most beloved faces have ceased. Look at this extreme and popular gesture. Pay attention to her widowness and survival. Understand her people." http://www.memoriachilena.cl/ut_link_dest.asp?.id5zuritacada

42. The information about this group is taken from Gustavo Buntinx's "The Power and the Illusion," which appeared in English in *Beyond the Fantastic*, 299–326. The members of the group in 1980 were María Luy, Francisco Mariotti, Rosario (Charo) Noriega, Juan Javier Salazar, Armando (Sherwin) Williams, and Mariella Zevallos.

43. Ibid., 321–322n9.

44. Ibid., 305. Buntinx has also become partly a mythmaker of Sarita Colonia, creating pages on the Web to collect testimonials of her miracles and write about the phenomenon: http://www.callao.org/informes/sarita.htm

45. Buntinx, *Mariotti*, unpaginated.

46. Buntinx, *EPS Huayco: Documentos*, 70. The artists were María Luy, Francisco Mariotti, Rosario (Charo) Noriega, Herbert Rodríguez, Juan Javier Salazar, Armando (Sherwin) Williams, and Mariella Zevallos.

Chapter 9

1. Spoerri, *Anecdoted Topography*, 203.

2. Cited in Spear, *Art in the Mind*, n.p.

3. Reprinted in *The Aesthetic Arsenal*, 9.

4. The first generation of orthodox pop artists (Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, etc.) focused on the reflection of reality mostly from a formalist and apolitical point of view. The web of relations that exists between the consumer and the product—in the sense of what products do to the consumer—was carefully left out. In an interview I conducted with Claes Oldenburg in 1965 ("Interview with Oldenburg"), he described pop art as a direct heir to abstract expressionism and informalism, carefully keeping pop within clean borderlines. According to Oldenburg, the flow of materials (and, I guess, emotions and gestures as well) had now become a flow of objects, but the general attitude toward "making" had not changed much. Political issues were rejected, according to him, because they, as well as sociology, economics, and others, belonged to or were disciplines too complex to engage in as an artist. This was true at least once one was really immersed in the making of art, and the issue ultimately became one of survival (ibid.). During a casual exchange with Robert Rauschenberg at an opening in that same year, he also denied that his work might have any political implications. Instead he stressed a direct and valueless reaction to the object. I had asked him if his Oracle exhibition reflected an acceptance of dadaism, and he responded: "No, dadaism has a political attitude, and I don't [have one]. I only do this and use these things because I like to, for love for the object itself" (Camnitzer, "La simpatía de los objetos"). He then referred to consumer objects as "the American landscape." Only Ovynd Fahlström—in an equally fleeting exchange—showed an interest in the political interpretations of his work. He acknowledged his departure from the other artists and explained it by the fact that he was born and brought up in Brazil. At the time, he was recovering from his indignation over the ongoing U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic and was very bitter about the political conformism of many of his colleagues. But then, it is also true that Fahlström did not see himself, nor was he seen, as a member with equal standing in the pop movement (ibid).

5. One often-cited example of Latin American pop art is the work of Cuban artist Raúl Martínez. Martínez drew from Andy Warhol's serialization of portraits and was interested in turning figures from the Cuban Revolution into icons, but in terms of the

on lived in France and Mexico. In 1962, together with Fernando Arrabal and Roland Topor, he founded the Movimiento Pánico, punning on both the fun of Pan and panic. He is credited with having made "L'imagination au pouvoir" (Let imagination take over the power structure) the slogan of the 1968 Parisian student movement.

56. Hadad Espinoza, *Alejandro Jodorowsky, VID(A)RTE*, 40–41.

57. Parra, "Tres Poesías," in *Versos de salón*, 53.

58. This poem/antipoem ambivalence is also a trait in some of the work by Uruguayan poet Idea Vilariño. In some stanzas of a poem, she writes: "The sea is no more than a hole with bitter water / in spite of men's verses / the sea is only a hole with dark water / The night is not deep, it is cold and long / in spite of men's verses, / love, dream, glands, madness." In "Goodbye" (1959), her poem has only four lines: "Here / from afar / I erase you. / You are erased" (Cesarco, *Idea Vilariño, LOVE POEMS*, n.p.).

59. Manifesto "To transform the Situation of Present Plastic Arts" (1963), reprinted in Marchán Fiz, *Del arte objetual*, 371–372.

60. Carreira also fancied himself an inventor, and he played around with pharmaceutical experiments that he tried out on his own body. When he died in 1993, it was as a consequence of blood poisoning caused by one of his experiments.

61. Carreira, *Poemas*.

62. Rizzo and Bedoya, "Ricardo Carreira."

63. Anastasi's *Six Sites* (1966) was particularly significant for its coincidence. It consisted of huge photo-silk-screened canvases bearing the image of the wall on which they were hung. This piece was shown in the Dwan Gallery in New York in 1967.

64. Carreira, "Compromiso y arte," photocopy provided by León Ferrari.

65. Masotta explained his own work: "Its express purpose is to invert the usual relationship between the mass media and that which is communicated. In a reciprocal and circular way, each medium reveals the presence of the other" (translated by Héctor Olea in Ramírez and Olea, *Inverted Utopias*, 532).

66. The piece is reminiscent of Hans Haacke's *Communication System—UPI* of 1969.

67. There is an unresolved debate about which work preceded which. Jacoby's was exhibited first, but Lamelas claims that his blueprints already existed.

Chapter 14

1. Ramírez, "Blueprint Circuits," written for the catalogue of New York's Museum of Modern Art's Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century show, 1993.

2. Marchán Fiz, *Del arte objetual*, 269, cited by Mari Carmen Ramírez. In the same spirit, Uruguayan poet Clemente Padín compiled an anthology of visual poetry: *De la representation a l'action*.

3. Ramírez, "Blueprint Circuits," 165.

4. Cited by Gabriel Peluffo in *Realismo social en el arte uruguayo*, 7.

5. Siqueiros, "Manifiesto del Sindicato," 1923.

6. Siqueiros's activism naturally led to imprisonment on several occasions, the last one from 1959 to 1964. These incarcerations gave him opportunities to return to art and to make easel paintings. Out of prison, he remained politically active to the end. For six years, 1925–1931, he went regularly to Jalisco to help organize miners. In the 1930s, he spent three years fighting on the side of the Republic in the Spanish civil war.

7. Siqueiros, 1933, cited by Ramírez in "El clasicismo dinámico," 132.

8. Hernández, *Artistas en trance.*

9. Chuzhak, quoted in Groys, *Total Art of Stalinism,* 27.

10. A good example of the confusion that can occur is shown by the reception accorded to the writings of Jorge Luis Borges. Those who wanted to develop a local identity often criticized him for being too cosmopolitan. Yet, his particular brand of cosmopolitanism was only possible in Buenos Aires; in his work, what was beyond borrowed or appropriated was specifically used to create a distinctive Latin voice representing Argentina (or, more specifically, Buenos Aires).

11. Ramírez, "Blueprint Circuits," 156.

12. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1965," 106.

13. The interest in tautology was so powerful during the late sixties that even somebody as politically aware and committed as Lucy Lippard would get trapped in its pitfalls. Asked to write an introduction for a catalogue for an exhibition in the Museo de Bellas Artes in Santiago de Chile in 1969, she submitted a page with lines and titled them "Some Lines by Lucy Lippard." I would also concede that in my own work of that time there were falls into tautological cuteness.

14. *The Sweet Name of Jesus*, a painting from the Quito school, shows the members of a battalion of white colonizers shooting a group of dark-skinned devils. The guns, six of which are visible in front of the group of soldiers, don't shoot bullets. Instead, they shoot the word "Jesus." Another painting, also from Quito, made by Manuel Samaniego y Jaramillo around 1780, is titled *Virtues and Vices of Europeans: The Hollander* and comes very close to contemporary conceptualists' use of tricks. It belongs to a series about European "advanced" countries that was made to serve as a didactic example for the colonies. The painting depicts an array of characters—people and animals—that, in the painter's mind, symbolize Dutch progress. The image is surrounded by a frame painted on the canvas itself, composed of exemplary statements like: "In Science he is eloquent and theological," "In regard to war he is powerful in the ocean," or, more surprisingly, "The master recognizes the union of free republics." The canvas, in turn, is framed in a real, elaborately carved wooden frame that is painted over. The real frame echoes the complexity of the illustrated one in a tautology that seems borrowed from recent decades. However, it is the painted frame that literally becomes the "frame of reference" to which the piece owes its meaning and reason for being.

15. For a heated exchange on this topic between Buchloh and Thierry de Duve, see Buchloh's "Conceptual Art and the Reception of Duchamp," 130.

16. Kosuth, "Art after Philosophy," 69n24.

17. Wilson, *Consilience,* 54.

18. In fact, although not widely accepted, conceptual art could be seen as the crowning of the modernist analytical development of isms. It could be interpreted as a form of aesthetic meta-analysis that focuses on analyzing analysis.

Chapter 15

1. Fabris, "Waldemar Cordeiro," 27.

2. Ibid., 27.

3. Ibid., 28.

4. Ibid., 28.

5. Cordeiro, "Arteônica: Electronic Art," reprinted in Fabris, "Waldemar Cordeiro," 33–34.

6. The neoconcrete manifesto was signed by Amilcar de Castro, Lygia Pape, Lygia Clark, Reinaldo Jardim, and Theon Spanudis (Morais, "Contra a arte," 76). Lygia Pape (1929–2004) should be mentioned here, although her work remained mostly linked to formalist strategies. One remarkable piece from 1960, *Libro do criação-luz* (*Book of Creation-Light*), consists of a series of eighteen painted boards, each with a square hole through which a rectangle of light is projected onto the floor.

7. Ferreira Gullar, "Manifesto neoconcreto," 118.

8. Brett, "Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica," 101.

9. When Max Bill won the Grand Prize in the first Biennial of São Paulo in 1951, he immediately became an influential figure in Brazil.

10. Bense's work was important at the time because he was one of the first authors to try to establish some order in a field that, in Latin America, had been ruled by old-fashioned hyperbolic poets who had made the discussion of art fairly impossible. However, as Helmut Draxler points out, the terms "creation" and "work of art" are burdened with ideological attributions that make a strict and exhaustive mathematical or informational-theoretical analysis impossible, added to the fact that Bense also aimed at a rationalization of "beauty" (Draxler, "Informel und Information," 77–78). This seems to be the precise point at which Clark and Oiticica departed from Bill and Bense.

11. It is interesting that one of the antecedents of the Internationale Situationiste, the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, also sprang up in direct opposition to Max Bill's ideas, as expressed in the Ulm School of Design. They predicated an antifunctional and antirational design that promoted surprise and arousal (see Home, *The Assault on Culture*, and for discussions between Asger Jorn and Max Bill, Ohrt, *Phantom Avantgarde*, 141–143).

12. To Oiticica, "Parangolé" was equivalent to what "Merz" was to Kurt Schwitters.

13. Oiticica, "Fundamental Bases," 86.

14. Oiticica, "Bólides," 66.

15. Oiticica, "Fundamental Bases," 86.

16. Oiticica, "Position and Program," 100–103.