

**Reflections on Meeting Margins:  
Transnational Art in Latin America and  
Europe, 1950-1978**  
Valerie Fraser  
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This research project, funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council, is a three-year collaboration between the Department of Art History and Theory at the University of Essex and TRAIN, the Research Centre for Transnational Art, Identity and Nation, at the University of the Arts London. The research team comprises Professor Valerie Fraser and Dr María Inígo Clavo at Essex, and Drs Michael Asbury and Isobel Whitelegg at TRAIN. We are grateful to Concinnitas for providing this opportunity to reflect on our research so far, and specifically on the conference we held as part of this project in December 2010.<sup>1</sup>

Meeting Margins is investigating transnational exchanges between artists from Europe and Latin America, and within Latin America, during the period 1950-1978. This is of course a very broad brief, in geographical as well as chronological terms, and we do not pretend to be aiming for complete coverage. On the contrary: our method is inductive rather than deductive, and our focus is on investigating detailed instances of transnational exchanges in order to understand how they worked and what they generated in terms of specific works of art and related debates. A further aim has been to encourage similar close-focus research elsewhere so that with more such case studies by scholars with different perspectives, and with opportunities such as our conference to share ideas and question orthodoxies, we can collectively make progress towards a thorough review of the history, historiography and theory of the art of the period. "Meeting Margins" is therefore a usefully flexible title for our project. Its primary reference, as the sub-title "transnational art in Latin America and Europe" implies, is the perceived marginality of Europe and Latin America in relation to the post-war ascendancy of the US. But we also like to think of it as referring to our own team meetings, and to meetings between us and scholars from elsewhere. The conference in December 2010 brought together at the University of Essex speakers from Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain and the UK. This event built on a forum for graduates and emerging scholars that we held in November 2009 in collaboration with Professors Andrea Giunta and Roberto Tejada at the University of Texas at Austin.<sup>2</sup> This Texas forum, entitled *Transnational Latin American Art from 1950 to the Present Day*, had a broader chronological brief and involved around 60 speakers from the US, the UK, Europe and Latin America, with the latter particularly well-represented. This was a very successful meeting of minds, where no-one could have felt that he or she was working in a marginalised field of research, and it is gratifying to see how it has resulted in further exchanges and collaborations, independent of our own Meeting Margins project, at both individual and institutional levels.

These include a second Permanent Seminar at Austin in October 2010<sup>3</sup> and other smaller meetings. Other events which are not (at least not to our knowledge) a direct result of Meeting Margins activity but which are an indication that there is growing interest in the broader field of art from Latin America in the post-war decades, include forthcoming symposia at Nottingham University, *Art Across Frontiers: Cross-Cultural Encounters in America*, in April 2011, and at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, *Encuentros: Artistic Exchange between the US and Latin America*, in October 2011.

Our inductive method is of necessity set within a broad framework of general hypotheses about cultural relations between different countries and continents and about the history of the art of and from Latin America during the post-war decades which it is useful to outline here. A key aim of this project has been to challenge the general art historical model whereby after World War II the world's artistic centre of gravity moved from Paris to New York by exploring other nodes, other sites of exchange and interaction, other models for artistic innovation. This is not to say that the US is unimportant for this research: many exchanges between Latin America and Europe are generated precisely by a sense of opposition to the political and cultural hegemony of the US. In other cases the US is more or less an irrelevance, and exchanges between Latin America and Europe may occur because they share interests which the US does not. In parallel with these transcontinental exchanges there were encounters between countries within Latin America that grew out of deliberate efforts to foster regional solidarity against, in some cases, both US and European power, as well as collaborations that are a result of internal affinities rather than external politics. In other words, our "margins" shift. Sometimes they comprise both Latin America and Europe in contrast to the implied centre of the US; sometimes it is the countries of Latin America that are marginalised by the implied centres of western art, i.e. both the US and Europe.

In most cases, however, it is the US that is our implied centre, and helps to provide the rationale for our start date of 1950. On 1 November 1950 Puerto Rican nationalists attempted to assassinate President Truman and the year marked a general increase in US military activity in the Caribbean and Central America: during the following decade this included repeated interventions in Guatemala, Panama and the Dominican Republic, before the famous failed invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in 1961. 1950 also saw the outbreak of the Korean War, the first major US military action of the Cold War, and opposition to US foreign policy forged links between those on the left across Latin America and Europe throughout our period, links that were often fostered by artistic responses. Opposition to US imperialism echoes through the art (the many contemporary uses of the words, packaging and graphic style of Coca Cola being obvious examples) and through the art historical and critical literature. Eva Cockcroft's essay, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War", written in 1974 in the immediate aftermath of the CIA-assisted coup in Chile, may have exaggerated the pressure exerted by the CIA on the Museum of

Modern Art to promote Abstract Expressionism in Latin America, but at the time her analysis only served to confirm the view of the US as an aggressive power using all means at its disposal to counter what it perceived as the communist threat.<sup>4</sup>

US domestic policy was also a matter of growing concern during the period. From the late 1940s the US, which had previously played such a key role in the fight against fascism and which had provided a welcome to those fleeing war and persecution in Europe, began to seem rather less benign a place. The McCarthy era witch-hunts against supposed communists moved up a gear in 1950 with the publication of the notorious Red Channels pamphlet that provided a list of 151 broadcasters, writers, musicians and Hollywood stars accused of being communists or communist sympathisers.<sup>5</sup> So during this period we see the first significant wave of emigration away from the US, including artists originating from Latin America who found Europe more congenial (Roberto Matta, for example, who spent the war years in New York) and those from Europe who moved from the US to Latin America. Mexico, which had been operating an open-door policy to anyone of leftist inclinations since the time of the Spanish Civil War, certainly benefited from the US's increasingly hard line as many artists and intellectuals of both US and non-US origins moved south during the 1940s and 50s such as Spanish film-maker Luis Buñuel, and African-American artist Elizabeth Catlett.<sup>6</sup>

Latin America had several repressive regimes of its own, of course, and during this period many artists were forced into exile or chose to emigrate, either temporarily or permanently, most notably from Venezuela in the 1950s, and from Brazil, Argentina and Chile in the 1960s and 1970s. Sometimes they moved elsewhere in Latin America, sometimes further afield, particularly to Europe, including Jesús Rafael Soto, from Venezuela to Paris in 1950; Julio Le Parc from Argentina to Paris in 1958; Hélio Oiticica from Rio to London in 1968; Felipe Ehrenberg from Mexico City to London in 1968; Juan Acha from Lima to Mexico in 1971; Mário Pedrosa from Brazil to Chile in 1971; León Ferrari from Buenos Aires to São Paulo in 1976. Migration is therefore an important factor in our project with artists and intellectuals moving from country to country, sometimes from political or economic necessity, sometimes out of curiosity, sometimes for private, sometimes official reasons, and in the process, bringing ideas, finding ideas, generating ideas in response to different contexts and cultures. But fruitful transnational exchanges can also be effected by the movement not of individuals but of art and ideas, of exhibitions, posters, letters, books and magazines. We are interested in exhibitions and biennials as the source of new themes and debates among the artists and critics of the host nation; similarly mail art networks provided a way for scattered and sometimes very sedentary artists to communicate with one another across long distances.

Another important strand in our research is that of the desire for greater pan-Latin American cooperation and integration, which can be found everywhere from government policy to personal inclination.

During the post-war decades, while European countries were building economic and social bridges with each other, Latin American governments, following the ideals of Bolívar and Martí, were also working towards greater integration, again usually with a view to economic development within a broader rhetoric of mutual support and collaboration. Initiatives include the first Latin American free trade agreement (Alalc) established by the Treaty of Montevideo in 1960, the Parlamento Latinoamericano launched in Lima in 1964, and the Sistema Económico Latinoamericano y del Caribe (Sela) which was signed in Panamá in 1975; in all cases Brazil was a member. Regional integration was promoted by smaller groupings including the Organización de Estados Centroamericanos (Odeca) founded in 1962 and the Andean Pact of 1969. There was also a UN-sponsored organization to promote economic development in Latin America: the Comisión Económica para América Latina (Cepal), founded in 1948, which from 1966 was based in purpose-built headquarters in Santiago in Chile.<sup>7</sup> These Latin American initiatives were intended to offset the influence of US-led Pan-American alliances including the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, signed in Rio de Janeiro in 1947 and of course the powerful and long-established OAS, Organization of American States. These governmental initiatives were paralleled by pan-Latin American cultural meetings, colloquia and biennales including the Bienal Iberoamericana de Pintura Coltejer in Medellín, Colombia, first held in 1968, the Salón de la Independencia Latinoamericana de Pintura held in Quito in 1972 and numerous events relating to prints which sprang up all over the continent in the 1960s and seventies, for example: Primer Certamen Latinoamericano de Xilografía, Buenos Aires, 1960; Bienal de San Juan de Grabado Latinoamericano, from 1970; Encuentro Latinoamericano de Grabados, Punta del Este, 1975.

But to return to our "margins": relations between Europe and Latin America. Our field is not defined simply in opposition to the US. On the contrary, during the post-war years Latin America and Europe continued to share specific interests where the US was an irrelevance, football being the most obvious example. During our period Latin America and Europe still dominated not just the game, and on very equal terms (as of course they still do), but also the hosting of the World Cup. In 1950, after a break of 12 years, the World Cup was held in Brazil, who lost in the final to Uruguay; in 1978 it was held in Argentina who won against Holland. In the arts too there remained a sense of the shared values that had been established in the 19th century, with a widespread respect for French language and culture throughout Latin America, a certain snobbish preference for British English over American, and an admiration for the scientific, technological and psychoanalytical advances of the German-speaking world. As a result the traditional middle class of Latin America would still often choose to complete their education in Europe where they also discovered the Rolling Stones and European brands of student activism. Europeans, meanwhile, and especially those on the left (including Eastern Europe of course), watched fascinated as

Cuba emerged to challenge the political model of western capitalist democracy and the US in particular. Part of the appeal of the radical politics of Latin America must surely be traceable to the visual impact of the associated art: the murals of Mexico and Chile, and the extraordinarily powerful multilingual posters produced in Cuba under the auspices of Ospaaal, the Organización de Solidaridad con los Pueblos de Asia, Africa y América Latina, which were intended to be very transnational.<sup>8</sup> These posters, which drew on a wide range of ideas from pop to Mexican muralism to traditional indigenous cultures, were influential on branches of art and graphic design in Europe and the US as well as in Latin America and indeed they continue to have strong reverberations. On the other hand Europeans, and not only those on the left, watched in horror as military regimes gained control of countries large and small across the region, usually with the tacit, sometimes with the explicit and active support of the US. During the 1960's and 70's many European countries openly welcomed political exiles, especially from Chile after the 1973 coup. But it was not only politics and political art that fascinated a Europe struggling to rebuild after the Second World War: Latin America, whether politically on the left or the right, had a new-found self confidence. Its modern architecture – Brasília in particular – and the “boom” in Latin American literature demonstrated that the region was more than capable of taking European ideas and remodelling them to make them its own. Europeans watched, awestruck, and wanted to learn more, as evidenced by the surge in publications on and from the region during the 1960s and 70s, by for example Penguin Books in the UK, and François Maspéro in Paris. These included original studies as well as translations from Spanish and Portuguese of material relating to the politics, history and culture of Latin America, as well as the novels of Fuentes, Cortázar, Vargas Llosa, García Márquez, Amado and others.<sup>9</sup> Within Latin America too improved public education and a thirst for knowledge, especially about their own country but also about the rest of the continent, was stimulated by the availability of cheap editions, which in turn stimulated further demand. An outstanding example of this was the Quimantú publishing house of Chile which under the Allende regime in the early 1970s published hundreds of both new and classic texts in editions of tens of thousands.<sup>10</sup>

Within many countries of Latin America during this period there was an energetic critical articulation of issues relating to the production of art in the region in relation to both that of the old centre of Europe, and the new centre of North America. One distinctive critical strand among many was that which sought to allow for a plurality of histories in order to avoid the implied teleologies of centre/periphery and new/old or modern/traditional, and which led to a reaffirmation of indigenous and popular culture as a central aspect of Latin America's heritage, and as part of a broader category of “art” than that imposed by the west. This had long been acknowledged in Mexico but elsewhere it was not always welcomed. In 1975 the award to popular Peruvian retablista artist Joaquín López Antay from Ayacucho, of the prestigious Premio Nacional de Fomento de la Cultura

Ignacio Merino, generated considerable consternation among certain “high” artists and branches of the cultural elite.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, of course, “high” artists repeatedly rediscovered the potential of popular art as well as pre-Columbian visual traditions, although usually in more oblique ways than the indigenism of earlier generations. Inca architecture and in particular the Peruvian archaeological site of Machu Picchu inspired artists from across the continent (César Paternosto in Argentina; Edgar Negret in Colombia), as did Andean textiles and quipus (Cecilia Vicuña, Chile; Olga de Amaral, Colombia; Oswaldo Viteri's, Ecuador; Jorge Elieson, Peru). Echoes of motifs, textures, colours and techniques drawn from other traditional crafts – pottery, basketry, body painting – abound. Perhaps the tremendous enthusiasm for print-making in Latin America during this period can in part be linked to a valorisation of the manual dexterity as well as the (traditionally overlooked) intellectual effort involved in artisanal work. Interest in indigenous and popular art also overlapped with and drew on European research into other forms of “otherness”: the art of children and the mentally ill, which in turn chimed with theories about psychology and the role of art in education. The writings of English art theorist Herbert Read, for example, were widely read and numerous editions of Spanish and Portuguese translations of his works were published in Latin America.<sup>12</sup> More generally, in researching the art and ideas of this period in Latin America a key characteristic could perhaps be an openness to alternative approaches, to the ancient and popular but also the radically new and untested, whether in technology or psychology or philosophy. A good example of this would be Swiss-Peruvian Francesco Mariotti who worked with digital media in the 1960's but who in the 1970's disappeared into the Andean highlands to live and work with a rural community. All of which is testimony to the growing self-confidence among artists and critics during the post-war decades, an atmosphere in which anything is possible and all forms of experimentation are valid, because there is neither a duty nor a desire to emulate a centre that is predominantly either patronising or uninterested.

Our end date of 1978, like our start date of 1950, is approximate, was chosen for a variety of reasons. 1978 certainly does not mark the end of dictatorships but there is a widespread shift towards democratization around this time in Latin America, as there is in Spain. It is perhaps symbolically significant that in 1978 the US ratified the treaty to gradually hand control of the Panama Canal over to Panama. And in 1978 the desire for cultural independence finds expression in exhibitions and meetings. This was the year of the first Bienal Iberoamericana de Pintura in Mexico and the first (and only) Bienal Latinoamericana de São Paulo, both of which were intended to affirm the autonomy, indeed the existence, of Latin American art in the face of US hegemony. As Aracy Amaral succinctly put it in the title of a review of the São Paulo event, “Yes, nós temos artistas”.<sup>13</sup> The essays that follow demonstrate that Latin America did indeed have artists. And critics and art historians, theorists and philosophers, psychoanalysts and cyberneticians, psychologists and musicians. The conference

helped to confirm to us that the broad framework within which we are working, outlined above, combined with a close focus on individual cases, as provided by our speakers, is an appropriate method for this sort of research. These essays draw on the papers presented to the conference to explore, expand, refine and modify aspects of both our broader questions and our individual areas of research.

#### Endnotes

1 See <[http://www.essex.ac.uk/arthistory/meeting\\_margins/](http://www.essex.ac.uk/arthistory/meeting_margins/)> (last accessed 2 April 2011) We are grateful to our tireless Administrator, Ian Dudley, without whom this project would be impossible. This conference was also supported by funding from our respective departments, by the University of Essex Collection of Latin American Art, and by a grant from the British Academy. We also benefited from a symposium at the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid, held shortly before our conference, which enabled us to share costs of bringing speakers from Latin America. We are grateful to all our sponsors and partners.

2 We are particularly grateful to Andrea Giunta for her enthusiastic response to our original suggestion to hold the forum at Austin. Her generous help and support ensured its success. Details of the programme can be found on: <[http://www.essex.ac.uk/arthistory/meeting\\_margins/mmgraduateforum.html](http://www.essex.ac.uk/arthistory/meeting_margins/mmgraduateforum.html)> (last accessed 2 April 2011) which also has links to the Texas website which includes texts of papers.

3 <[http://www.finearts.utexas.edu/aah/art\\_history/special\\_programs/latin\\_seminar/about.cfm](http://www.finearts.utexas.edu/aah/art_history/special_programs/latin_seminar/about.cfm)> (last accessed 2 April 2011)

4 Marcio Siwi's paper at the Permanent Forum at Austin in 2009 challenged Cockcroft's argument: <[http://www.finearts.utexas.edu/aah/art\\_history/special\\_programs/latin\\_seminar/conferences2009.cfm](http://www.finearts.utexas.edu/aah/art_history/special_programs/latin_seminar/conferences2009.cfm)> (last accessed 2 April 2011).

See: Cockcroft, Eva. Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War, in: *Artforum*, vol.12, no.10, p. 43-54. June 1974.

5 Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television, published by the journal *Counterattack*, 22 June 1950. Among those named were Leonard Bernstein, Orson Welles, Pete Seeger, Lary Adler, Arthur Miller and Charlie Chaplin. See: Schrecker, Ellen. *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.

6 Schreiber, Rebecca. *Cold War Exiles in Mexico: US dissidents and the culture of critical resistance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

7 For a discussion of the transnational nature of the architecture of the Cepal building see Fraser, Valerie. *Building the New World: Studies in the Modern Architecture of Latin America 1930-1960*. London: Verso, 2000.

8 Ospaaal was founded at the Primera Conferencia Tricontinental de la Habana in 1966. The text on most posters is in English, French, Spanish and Arabic. See Starmer, Dugald. *The Art of Revolution: 96 Posters from Cuba*. London: Fall Mall Press, 1970.

9 A classic in the first category was Jean Franco's *Modern Culture of Latin America: Society and the Artist*, Penguin 1970; translations include works by Carlos Marighella, Miguel Arraes and Salvador Allende (Penguin) and Carlos Romero, Francisco Julião, José Carlos

Mariategui and Rubén Vázquez Díaz (Maspero).

10 The production of cheap editions of classic texts was part of a broader project of modernity and education. The earliest was the Everyman Library founded in the UK in 1906. A Spanish example that was widely distributed in Latin America was Araluce Ediciones, see Silva, Renán. *El libro popular en Colombia, 1930 - 1948*, in: *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, 30, p. 20-37. August 2008/2008.

11 Macera, Pablo. *Pintores populares andinos*. Lima: Fondo del Libro del Banco de los Andes, 1979; Macera, P. *Centenario de Don Joaquín López Antay*. Lima: Instituto Riva Agüero, 1997.

12 For example, Read's *Icon and Idea: the function of art in the development of human consciousness*, first published by Harvard University Press in 1955, was published in Mexico in 1957 as *Imagen e Idea* by *Fondo de Cultura Económico* who reprinted it repeatedly over the next 20 years.

13 Amaral, Aracy. Yes, nós temos artistas, in: *Arte Hoje*. Rio de Janeiro: Rio Gráfica e Editora, ano 1, n.11, p. 16-18. maio 1978.

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### Transnational exchanges and the popularisation of scientific thought

Michael Asbury  
(pages 14-23)

In 1955, then deeply involved in the activities of the London-based Independent Group (IG), John McHale wrote a letter to Buckminster Fuller asking to what extent the American designer had been influenced by the Bauhaus. Buckie's reply was extensive and unambiguous. He argued that it was his own life experience, his work with machinery in general, that led him to the design solutions as opposed to any debt he supposedly had to the Bauhaus "style" which he saw as essentially superficial.<sup>1</sup>

McHale's assumption is telling for it betrays a tendency that considers influence in art and design as necessarily discipline specific. If this type of assumption is still present today, it is perhaps because of the perceived specificity of art history and would suggest that the issue is at the core of the crisis that the discipline has experienced over the last decades. That is to say, although influences from outside the subject area may indeed be acknowledged within the theoretical and

aesthetic/conceptual constructions proposed by artists and art critics, these are usually dealt with in order to construct teleologies rather than placed in conjunction with each other.

One may argue that perhaps certain issues are indeed more appropriately discussed through methodologies beyond those traditionally employed by art history. However, there is a case to be made in defence of art history which becomes explicit through projects such as Meeting Margins. The activities and interests of the Independent Group are a good example of a certain type of prejudice that has pervaded art historical narratives. On the one hand, the IG's openness to the theory and practice stemming from Continental Europe and the US are today seen in light of the drive of young artists, critics and designers attempting to overcome the austere environment of post war Britain, as opposed to the general backward attitude that had characterised the UK's relation to modernist ideals. On the other hand, the first attempts at a historicisation of the IG, initiated by former members themselves, privileged its role as precursor of Pop Art in the context of the increasing notoriety that Pop held in the US. This not only did a disservice to the historical understanding of the IG, overshadowing the diverse set of enquiries that different members were engaged in, but undermined its achievements in light of the emergent US canon.

A similar situation is current in relation to Brazilian concrete and neoconcrete movements.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, many of the interests of those involved or close to these movements coincide with those explored by the IG during the course of the 1950s, as was the case with theories and concepts such as Information Theory, Gestalt Psychology, Cybernetics and Jungian archetypes. Rather than a packaged set of theoretical issues that accompanied imported art trends, it seems therefore more appropriate to consider these new "scientific" means of approaching the art object as theoretical currencies that spread around the world during the post war era and were absorbed in different ways at local levels.

With this problematic in mind, this section of the dossier focuses on papers delivered at the first session of the Meeting Margins conference in December 2010. The initial assumption being that often it was the circulation of ideas beyond the specificity of the field that led to coincidental experiences within art practice.

The IG emerged during the early 1950's from within the auspices of the newly inaugurated Institute of Contemporary Art in London. The relationship that the group had with the directorship, particularly with Herbert Read, is generally seen to have been conflictive. However, beyond Read's arduous, albeit rather dated, attempt to articulate the legacies of Surrealism and Constructivism during the British interwar years, he had been a key figure behind the introduction of what I am broadly calling "scientific knowledge" as a subject for debate within ICA circles and it is possible to gauge his influence through subjects such as Darcy Thompson's publication of *On Growth and Form*, Read's own work drawing on Gestalt psychology and Suzanne Langer, his correspondence with Carl Jung

amongst many other concerns. Members of the IG would at times draw themselves close to such issues and at other times become distant or indeed disagree with them.

In Brazil a similar dynamic can be found around the figure of Mário Pedrosa and the concrete groups in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo during the course of the 1950's. A symptom of the confrontational positions that characterised the constructive movements in Brazil, the concretist rejection of intuition and more specifically the work of the insane in favour of more objective forms of apprehending the object of art is a case in point.

The focus here is on three interconnected routes through which ideas that could broadly be described as scientific were absorbed and developed at a local level. Other than simply an exercise in historical revision, the distinct temporalities that emerge enhance not only the innovation of post war Brazilian avant-garde practice but serve to assert the crucial role of art history in articulating a complex matrix of ideas current at a time, and how this rather than affirming any sense of derivation serves to emphasise the uniqueness of the specific context.

It is not the case here of claiming the redemption of the discipline through the widening of its scope (from the Western Northern Hemisphere perspective). On the contrary, it is a case of stating the potential agency that art history can still offer through the production of new narratives and the articulation of older ones from wider geopolitical contexts.

This particular section of the conference should be considered not as a group of individual contributions but as a collective effort that problematises the conventional reading of constructivism in Brazil. Together they not only highlight the historiography of how scientific thought was absorbed within those avant-gardes but emphasise how individual opinions and allegiances changed over the period.

Suzana Vaz focused on the dynamic exchange between Dr Nise da Silveira and Carl Gustav Jung and, in turn, how this informed the relationship between the psychiatric doctor and the art critic Mário Pedrosa. We find here an equivalent articulation of ideas that informed Herbert Read's publication entitled "Education through Art" published in 1943, where the critic articulated Gestalt psychology with Jungian theories of archetypes in order to study the development of children through analysis of their art.

Vaz states the fundamental role that the artist Almir Mavignier had in establishing the art studios at the Engenho de Dentro psychiatric hospital and inviting other artists to engage with those activities, such as Abraham Palatnik and Ivan Serpa as well as the critic Mário Pedrosa. The impact this experience had on this group was considerable and is often argued to have been one of the founding moments of the constructivist movements in Brazil. Mavignier remembers one patient in particular, Artur Amora, whose painting impressed his interlocutors due to its geometrical arrangements achieved without the benefit of art historical knowledge. Amora had developed during those therapy sessions a system based upon the representation of domino pieces.

A process of abstraction that gradually reduced representation until his paintings became composed of "pure" geometrical forms with seemingly random alignments of identical squares over the surface.

Following his prize-winning participation at the first Bienal de São Paulo in 1951, Ivan Serpa would use one such work by Amora for the cover of the Grupo Frente exhibition catalogue, bringing the work of the patient within the scope of what would prove to be a crucial development within the history of art in Brazil. Indeed, one that today receives considerable international attention. At the very root of the "sensitive geometry" that characterised the particular strand of constructivism developed in Brazil from the 1950s lies therefore the contact with an "outsider" artist whose work could be equally incorporated under the umbrella of Art Brut, as defined contemporaneously by Jean Dubuffet. This bridge between what consensually are irreconcilable strands of art history, would become one of the critical factors in the art of a generation of artists in Brazil during the 1960s: a conscious debt to the legacy of constructivism combined with a dada-like irreverent attitude.

Although her principle focus was that of investigating how Nise da Silveira absorbed Jungian theory as a means of understanding the relevance of the art of the patients, Vaz nevertheless highlights the impact that Mário Pedrosa had on supporting and encouraging such work. Vaz quotes Silveira:

The art critics, for our surprise, have been far more attentive than the Brazilian psychiatrists to the plastic expression of the schizophrenics. In fact, the majority of the psychiatrists around the world refuse to acknowledge the artistic value of the paintings and drawings of the mentally ill. Entrenched in their positions, they maintain the same clichés and speak of "psychotic art" or "psychopathologic art". They remain clinged to the traditional concepts of psychiatry and stubbornly think that such painting is not but the reflection of psychic deterioration and its symptoms.<sup>6</sup>

Vaz drew on a particular art historical narrative formulated by Paulo Herkenhoff who posited the experience of artists with psychiatric patients as a foundational characteristic of Rio de Janeiro's constructivist avant-garde, a suggestion that places its significance as determining the specific trajectory that geometric abstraction would take in Rio de Janeiro. According to Vaz:

Herkenhoff also states that, with the artists Almir Mavignier, Ivan Serpa and Abraham Palatnik, "the matrix of Rio de Janeiro's geometric art runs through the Engenho de Dentro" and that, while in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, the artists were "negotiating the passage from figurative form to abstraction", they were exposed, at the Engenho de Dentro, to geometric painting even before knowing Max Bill, through "an absolute experience in terms of what might be the freedom of creation", in which "geometric rationality would confront psychological overflowing", a

basis that would enable Neoconcretism to "radically insert subjectivity in the rational universe of geometry".<sup>6</sup>

If it remains important to remember that the concrete-neoconcrete scission that occurred between the Ruptura group from São Paulo and the Frente group from Rio de Janeiro, already possessed prior to their formations the very seed of their dissolution: the issue of intuition within the process of production of art and the questioning of established socio-cultural hierarchies, the antagonism between the two groups is perhaps more complex, as Sergio Martins suggested at the conference.<sup>7</sup>

The specificity that Herkenhoff argues is problematised when considered through the perspective of Mário Pedrosa's investment in Gestalt Psychology. Martins entangles Pedrosa's experience with Nise da Silveira and the patients at Engenho de Dentro with the perceived antagonism between Gestalt and Phenomenology, suggesting that allegiances amongst Paulista and Carioca artists were far more fluid than is often assumed.

Martins takes issue with Ronaldo Brito's influential *Neoconcretismo: Vertice e Ruptura do Projeto Construtivo Brasileiro*<sup>8</sup> claiming that despite "his often-insightful analysis" and that "it correctly addresses the use and the problematic limitations of Gestalt theory as a conceptual model for painting, it fails to recognize the crucial role it played in consolidation of geometric abstraction in Brazil." For Martins:

Brito's all-too- neat historical progression is to blame here: for him, Gestalt is little more than a theoretical apparatus that was "imported" alongside other international Concretist tenets by the São Paulo group, which remained, in turn, little more than a secondary deviation, a pale shadow of its European predecessors. The Neoconcrete phenomenological critique would thus represent both the "apex" and the "rupture" of the so-called "Brazilian constructive project" in that it realigned the language of Constructivism vis-à-vis the local cultural reality, in a creative outburst that was synthetic but also highly contradictory and thus self-destructive.

Martins argument focuses on Pedrosa's 1949 thesis "On the Affective Nature of Form", which resulted from his studies on Gestalt Psychology while in exile in Europe. To identify Gestalt with the Paulista brand of concrete art is to ignore the fact that it preceded the incorporation of *art concret* within Brazil. Martin's argument is that Pedrosa's thesis although influential at the moment in which it was produced was only published in 1979, due to the author's political exile. It therefore had been mostly forgotten when in 1977 the Brazilian constructive avant-gardes became a subject for art history. Martins analyses the shift that occurred in Waldemar Cordeiro's position with regard to such theories, by investigating the specific context of their insertion within the field. Pedrosa's theory is initially discussed within the antagonism between abstract and figurative art that characterised the 1940s. Emiliano Di Cavalcanti is quoted as an example of the position against abstraction:

These artists construct expanded little worlds out of free-floating fragments of real things: these are monstrous visions of amoebic or atomic residues, microscopically revealed by sick minds. For me, whenever an artist nurtures his imagination on those obscure fissures of the world, then reason is not at work.<sup>9</sup>

While stating how Cordeiro and Pedrosa were at one with each other in defending abstraction, Martins states:

Answering to attacks such as this, Cordeiro would argue that "Only by objectivizing, by depersonalizing a form can one make it a matter of reflection, determining the intelligibility of a work."<sup>10</sup> As I mentioned, intelligibility was the crux of the debate. For Di Cavalcanti's side, abstract forms were irrational, and Cordeiro tried to reverse this logic by arguing, in a Van Doesburgian manner, that intelligibility required "a real language of painting" with "colour and lines that are colour and lines and do not aspire to be pears or men."<sup>11</sup> These lines were written in 1949, the year Cordeiro met Pedrosa and learned about his thesis – both were obviously on the same side. This is what Gestalt theory critically offered: a scientific basis for deciding an argument upon which the legitimacy of abstraction ultimately depended.

Martins further problematizes the debate by comparing Di Cavalcanti's attacks on abstraction with "those of art historian Quirino Campofiorito, who had targeted, in 1947, art produced by 'live instincts uncontrolled by reason.'<sup>12</sup> The distinction being that the latter was targeting the first exhibition by the Patients at the Engenho de Dentro. The comparison serves to emphasise the coherence of Pedrosa's logic:

This is the full scope of the reversal Gestalt theory brought about: if abstraction sometimes coincided with the art of the mentally ill – as [with the] painting by the Engenho de Dentro patient Arthur Amora – it was not because abstract artists were deranged, but because abstract forms were universal and thus prior to cultural hierarchies. Like Pedrosa's thesis, the history of the Engenho de Dentro workshop was mostly excluded from those initial formulations of the "Brazilian Constructive Project".

Martins went on to analyse the shifting position of Cordeiro, who, during the course of the 1950s as principle spokesman for the concrete artists in São Paulo would become engaged in a vicious exchange with Ferreira Gullar who spoke on behalf of the Carioca group.

Now, between the 1949 debates and the later, prescriptive application of Gestalt, the defence of abstraction as a whole had given way, in Cordeiro's 1952 *Ruptura* manifesto, to a distinction between the "new art" and "hedonist non-figurativism".<sup>13</sup> The former, Cordeiro stated, should be "a means of knowledge that can be deduced from concepts", while the latter was rejected alongside "the 'wrong"

naturalism of children, of madmen, of primitivists, of expressionists, of surrealists, etc."<sup>14</sup>

What is more, in a 1956 text simply entitled *The Object*, Cordeiro finally reversed Pedrosa's temporal formula: "Content in art is not a starting point, but an arrival point."<sup>15</sup> This radical closure is actually consistent with the contradictions Merleau-Ponty observes in Gestalt when he argues that it had questioned an entirely subjective predetermination of perception only to adopt an entirely objective one. For his part, Gullar would reclaim the temporality of Pedrosa's formula at the height of his 1957 polemic with the São Paulo group, by arguing that the concrete poem "starts when its reading is over", creating "a durable object for the viewer".<sup>16</sup> By gauging Cordeiro's and Gullar's formulations against Pedrosa's, my point is that Neoconcretism shouldn't be seen simply as a reaction against Concretism. Gullar characterized their relationship as dialectical, and I think it is possible to locate the first term here not in concretist orthodoxy, but in Pedrosa's deployment of Gestalt as a defence of the non-determined character of art. If phenomenology was indeed played against Gestalt theory, as it undoubtedly was, it was nevertheless in order to reclaim the initial critical edge Gestalt possessed back in 1949.

Finally German Alfonso Adad explored another theoretical currency that ran across the 1950's, amongst these groups of artists, namely the concept of cybernetics.<sup>17</sup> Adad investigates how the concept itself was adapted within distinct national contexts, highlighting the particular version that was disseminated in Brazil. Adad concludes with a discussion of how the concept of cybernetics would be distinctly approached from the perspective of Abraham Palatnik, one of the artists originally involved at the Engenho de Dentro psychiatric hospital, and the concrete poets in São Paulo, who as Martins discussed shifted away from Pedrosa's articulation of Gestalt Psychology and intuitive abstraction.

Norbert Wiener's 1948 publication on cybernetics had fascinated the world, and responses within the field of arts are indeed equally widespread. Focusing on the publication in the pages of the *Sunday Supplement* of the *Jornal do Brasil*, Adad discusses a text by Pierre Latil on the subject.

If the scientific methods behind cybernetics, control and automation would lead one to instinctively associate these theories with the Paulista concrete artists and poets – indeed they did in fact make references to these themselves – the platform through which this was first published in Brazil disrupts such immediate assumptions. The *Sunday Supplement* of the *Jornal do Brasil* was after all the principle avenue through which the Carioca concretists expressed their oppositions to the São Paulo group, a debate that would lead the following year in the pages of that same newspaper to the publication of the *Neoconcrete Manifesto*.

Adad's paper is complementary to those by Martins and Vaz in that he

questions the presupposition that the absorption of ideas at a local level is a neutral operation. The paper's principle focus is on how the very notion of cybernetics had been adapted with distinct "accents" within different national contexts, the Soviet Russian, the French and the Brazilian. One could also add to this list the prominence of the topic amongst Independent Group members during the 1950s. As Adaid argues:

The story of cybernetics presented by Latil may be the same as Wiener's but the way in which the story is told, as well as its agenda, are more radical than the initial conception. The fact is that Latil rewrote cybernetics' epistemological origins away from its technical and mathematical origins. Wiener himself would try to frame cybernetics outside these technical fields. The difference here is that Latil frames cybernetics within an exclusive French tradition. In the *Journal do Brasil*,<sup>14</sup> Latil states that life could "if not be explained at least approached by rationale and experiments of mathematical character", attributing this rationale to Claude Bernard, a 19<sup>th</sup> Century French physiologist while the interdisciplinary emphasis is attributed to Henri Poincaré, which is quoted by Latil as saying that "the great progresses are produced when two sciences approach each other, when they become conscious of the similarities of their forms, despite the dissimilitude of their object".<sup>15</sup> We should note that neither Bernard nor Poincaré are quoted in Wiener's original work. Certainly this propensity to reframe theories and ideas for one's own purposes is commonplace and not a French or Soviet exclusive activity. What we pretend to show here is rather the extent in which Latil and others would go to legitimize their conviction in cybernetics. Namely, to create a nationalistic discourse that sought to contextualize cybernetics within their own national and intellectual tradition.

As Adaid argued, in Brazil the arrival of ideas around cybernetics did not however become engrained in nationalistic discourse but were "digested" as being symptomatic of the more general condition of modernity. He states that such notions became articulated within the field of art primarily amongst the São Paulo concrete art and poetry group, being expressed by Décio Pignatari. However, Adaid's discussion on how the Campos brothers approached the Rio de Janeiro-based artist Abraham Palatnik in order to explore the possibilities of applying the notion of cybernetics to poetry and art suggests that the antagonism between artists from each city was not as clear cut as is often argued. Although Palatnik was not a member of the neoconcrete group, his involvement with those early workshops at the Engenho de Dentro and his affirmation of the significance of intuition within the production of his Cinechromatic "machines" places him at a certain distance from the more "objective" approached of the Paulistas. If the experience at Engenho de Dentro was the impetus for Palatnik's effort to produce

these machines, Pedrosa's role in encouraging these machines cannot be underestimated. As Palatnik (quoted in Adaid) states: "The comprehension of the formal aspects, not only in the external world but also at the unconscious roots of human activity, would dismantle the doubt and the controversy that exists between the relations of art, science, technology and communication".<sup>16</sup>

Although far from being exhaustive, the conjunction of these three narratives serves the purpose of suggesting a more complex historiography of the concrete and neoconcrete movements in Brazil, one which we hope underlines the importance of art history at a moment in which the discipline is frequently invoked, particularly outside Brazil and often in the most banal manner, as a tool for the legitimisation of national contemporary practices.

#### Endnotes

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**Sharing imaginaries around may 68:  
art and political activism in  
Latin America and Europe**  
María Iñigo Clavo and Valerie Fraser  
(pages 24-33)

In 1971, when the Spanish artist Julio Plaza was living in Brazil, he presented the work *Evolução/Revolução*, a sequence of images which begin as Nixon and then gradually transform into a portrait of a Vietnamese woman bearing weapons on her back. In this way we are presented with a transition from masculine imperialist power to a peasant woman empowered through the struggle; from that which is allowed to speak to that which is silenced by mass

media. The possibility of speaking from a position of Otherness was one of the major concerns of theorists working in Latin America as well as Europe during the sixties and seventies, and the theme was addressed several times during the panel *Shared imaginaries: art and political activism in Latin America and Europe, 1950-1978*.

One of the most famous slogans of the late sixties was *Yankies goes home!* which appeared frequently in demonstrations in Latin America and was particularly visible during the May '68 demonstrations in France. Robert J. Young used this in his important book *White Mythologies* as evidence of the way European anti-imperialism had been inspired by "Third World" movements and struggles.<sup>1</sup> Young's aim was to interrogate left-wing European histories from non-European perspectives, thereby looking to reorient Western history. He demonstrates how, during the Cold War, many anti-colonial movements internationally were questioning the Soviet model of communism while the Communist Party found itself unable to support these struggles for independence. Thus, for example, we find the Communist Party of Algeria, under the influence of the French CP, unwilling to support the Algerian War of Independence.<sup>2</sup> It is no coincidence that Che Guevara delivered his critique of the Soviet stance on anti-imperialist struggles internationally when he was in Algeria, in 1965. His own capture and death in 1967 was itself a result of treason by the leader of the Bolivian Communist Party. At the same time the French CP refused to acknowledge the May '68 demonstrations as legitimate revolutionary action. Young shows that they were afraid of a popular revolution they would not be able to control, and were unwilling to concede that the student riots were in any genuine sense revolutionary, as the only true revolutionary option was their own "Revolutionary Party". The CP argued that rather than revolutionary forces, the workers and students in the street were Trotskyists, Maoists or Anarchists. The CP's confused response to the revolutionary events is well illustrated by the famous example of Theodor Adorno, who called the police when students occupied the Frankfurt Institute where he was teaching Marxist theory.

The overall confusion and conflict attending these events, and epitomised in Adorno's response to the student unrest, need to be understood as symptoms of major transformations in the substance of left-wing politics. This re-imagining entailed important changes on the left. Doctrinaire Marxism was challenged and expanded as attention was placed on women's rights, sexual and racial difference, immigration and, in particular, decolonising struggles. A key impetus for these changes came from beyond Europe, spelling a shift in concerns and imaginaries that became known in France as *tiermondisme*, "third-worldism".<sup>3</sup> Of general importance were Maoism in China and the Cuban Revolution. But attention had also turned to the specific tactics of resistance that were being developed and deployed in decolonising contexts: boycotts, sit-down protests, passive resistance, various forms of Gandhian civil disobedience and the "foquismo" advocated by Che Guevara.

Fanon (Martinique/Algeria), Neto (Angola), Almícar Cabral (Guinea

Bissau/ Cape Verde) and Césaire (Martinique) all played an important role in this European left turn. Exiled in Mexico, the Argentinian philosopher Enrique Dussel reveals the optimism that fuelled this global cartography of thinkers and movements in his 1977 *Liberation Theory*. In it, he wonders how Fanon's texts might provide the foundations for a universal new philosophy.<sup>1</sup> What Dussel was attempting with *Liberation Theory* was a translation of revolutionary political thought into philosophical language. Eduardo Grüner's paper showed how this intellectual movement of the Third World was fundamental for authors from elsewhere. The example of Sartre is very clear. He began working with Frantz Fanon on the national liberation movements in Africa and wrote several texts revising Aimé Césaire's concept of *négritude*. Fascinated by the figures of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, he supported the resistance movements of Latin America. Grüner raises a question which in one form or another runs through most of the papers in the session: the position of the artist who wishes to speak on behalf of, from the perspective of the other. Both Pasolini and Sartre were anxious to "let the Other speak for himself". This allowed Sartre to understand how Césaire's concept of *négritude*, much criticised at the time as essentialist, was an attempt to generate an independent voice, something which in 1985 Spivak was to defend as "strategic essentialism". For his part, Pasolini chose to use the Friulian dialect from the region in Italy where he grew up in order to create a dialogue between low and high culture. He was fascinated by the spaces of marginality and with defining his place as an intellectual, and an important part of his search had to do with generating expressive tactics in order to incorporate this alterity in his poetry and his cinema productions.

In a similar sense, Oriana Baddeley's presentation explained the considerable influence that the revolutionary movements of Latin America had in Great Britain, inspiring exhibitions and debates within the British left. Baddeley showed how the ideas Siqueiros elaborated in his *Art and Revolution*, first published in English in 1975, can be traced in the debates surrounding two exhibitions mounted in London in 1978, *Art for Society at the Whitechapel* and particularly *Art for Whom?* at the Serpentine Gallery. Both exhibitions raised questions about relations between art, artist and audience, and the catalogue of the *Art for Whom?* show contained a manifesto calling for political action in terms very similar to those used by Siqueiros. One of the collectives involved in this exhibition, *The Public Art Workshop*, had produced some Siqueiros-influenced murals underneath the Westway flyover at Royal Oak in west London. These provided a model for other such community mural projects in the 1980s that produced archetypal political images of opposition to the Thatcher government. It is worth noting that Hélio Oiticica, influenced by the ideas of Ferreira Gullar, in his celebrated text *Esquema da nova objetividade* of 1967, had already asked "For whom does the artist make work?"

In contrast to Baddeley's paper, Miguel López showed how left-wing activism in Europe also influenced Latin American intellectuals. López' example was the Peruvian critic Juan Acha whose experience in France

in May '68 was crucial in defining the cultural and artistic project he would undertake on his return to Peru. In this sense, a cyclic voyage of concepts and forces linked Europe and the decolonising world during this period of conceptual transformation and experimentation on the left. López traced Acha's personal and professional trajectory, showing his gradual political radicalisation until he was imprisoned in 1970, ostensibly for possession of marijuana, but in reality for his political activities. This discussion in turn connected directly with Jaime Vindel's proposal. Vindel was also interested in "periodizing" debates about the politicization of art, this time in Argentina, in order to understand the different moments of political compromise, but also to analyse the various interpretations of these histories. To do this he selected two case studies that are fundamental to an understanding of the evolution of debates in Argentina in the 1970s: Ricardo Carpani and León Ferrari. Vindel reviewed what has become known as the "itinerary of 68", the events prior to and resulting from the Tucumán Arde actions in Rosario, from the perspective of these two very influential individuals, and their agreements and differences during the seventies, when debates about the place of the artist in the revolution were being consolidated.

But the objectives and arguments of these historiographical revisions by López and Vindel are necessarily different. Juan Acha is a writer who has been little studied in Peru and López' aim was therefore to historicize his work in Peru and Latin America more generally. Perhaps Acha's most influential writings were those he produced in Mexico during his years of exile following his release from prison, and his conceptualizations, particularly his theory of "non-objectualism", had wide repercussions in the seventies throughout Latin America. López's intention is therefore to tell a history that has not been told before, while Vindel's task is to review a history that is already part of the official national narrative of Argentina. Within the panel "Tucumán Arde, for example" his concern is to understand the various interpretations of that event during the latter part of the 20th century. For Vindel's second contribution, to the "Shared imaginaries" panel, he focused on explaining the antecedents to the debate and exploring the nuances in order to identify more precisely the different ways the history of the "itinerary of 68" has been told, retold and mythicised; and in order to clarify the political position of artists within this debate, their adherence to or rejection of socialist realism, and their mutual confrontations.

When we started to think about this "Shared imaginaries" session we were interested in the idea of the co-authorship of a common understanding of Revolution during that period. But we were also aware that different meanings, complex polemics, and diverse socio-political projects all coexist at any one time within the same concept. We were therefore particularly interested in asking how this common understanding of Revolution might impel many different movements, but at the same time might be accompanied by misunderstandings and subject to fluidity depending on the context. We can identify many examples of such disconnections and contradictions. It is

clear that Juan Acha, as Miguel López explained, "confused" the ideals of May '68 with the political process in Peru under President Velasco's self-styled "Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces". Although Velasco proclaimed his government as revolutionary it was soon evident that this revolution did not share the concerns for sexual and cultural liberation that shaped the social movements in Europe; on the contrary, it was repressive and authoritarian. Acha, in contrast to many intellectuals in Latin America at the time such as Ferreira-Gullar, Glauber Rocha, Frederico Morais or Marta Traba, did not see underdevelopment as an identifying characteristic from which to construct a Latin American artistic vanguard; on the contrary, as López noted, for Acha the vanguard was the position from which to combat underdevelopment.

The meaning attached to the idea of Revolution was a major issue during the sixties and seventies. During this period artists held frequent meetings to discuss relationships between art and revolution in an anti-imperialist context, first in Argentina (for example, the first Encuentro Nacional de Arte de Vanguardia was held in Rosario in 1968), then in Chile (Encuentro de Artistas Plásticos del Cono Sur of 1972), and then Cuba where Encuentros de Plástica Latinoamericana were held in 1972, 1973, 1976, 1979. Sometimes such meetings were accompanied by exhibitions. We can start to ask what was the role of the revolutionary in art, and how these understandings travelled with the artist and their works between contexts and different meetings. For instance, consider the following two pieces, one made in Buenos Aires and the other sent to Cuba - both in the same year: the first, "Proceso a nuestra realidad" was made for a competition organized in Argentina in August 1973. The prize was sponsored by a well-known brand of acrylic paint, Acrílico Paolini, whose only requirement of entrants was that they used their paint. In June of that year, when Perón had arrived in Buenos Aires' Ezeiza airport following eighteen years in exile, the right-wing Peronist militia shot into the crowd killing 13 and injuring some 300 people. Perla Benevise, Eduardo Leonetti, Luis Pazos, Juan Carlos Romero and Edgardo Vigo decided to participate in the Acrílico Paolini competition with a response to the Ezeiza massacre. In essence, the artists assembled a large wall about six metres long and two metres high. Friends helped them to carry it brick by brick up into the gallery during hours before the opening. Once erected they stuck up political posters with portraits of the sixteen members of a left wing Peronist militia who had been killed in another massacre in Trelew, Patagonia, a year earlier. These sixteen had been executed after attempting to escape from jail. Among the various slogans inscribed on the wall two were particularly well-known in the streets of Argentina: "Apoyo a los leales. Amasijo a los traidores", and "Ezeiza es Trelew". The acrylic paint was present in the form of a drop of blood on a card with the inscription "esta gotadesangre denuncia que el pueblo no la derrama inútilmente" (this "dropofblood" proclaims that the people do not shed it in vain). The central idea of the installation was to

bring the struggle on the streets into the art space. As Ana Longoni has said:

This is not about a peaceful, thoughtful "return to the museum" but a violent eruption of the events of the street into the relatively untouched ambiance of the museum. A reverse trajectory to the itinerary of '68 not only because of the direction, but because the call to political violence is not enacting it, embedding it in the body of the art, of the public and of the artist, but presenting it, transporting it from the street where it is already installed.<sup>7</sup>

Our second example appeared in October of that same year, 1973, in the second Encuentro de Plástica Latinoamericana in Havana. This was one of the most lively of the artists' meetings and received extensive coverage in the Cuban press. Moved by the recent coup in Chile, many artists produced works, actions and declarations in support of the Chilean people. The Argentinian artist Graciela Carnevale, however, took a work to Havana that dealt with the Trelew massacre. The image was of two bloodied bodies killed in the massacre, together with a list of the names of all who had died, and at the end, one of the key revolutionary slogans, "Hasta la victoria siempre". Both Carnevale's work and the "Proceso a nuestra realidad" of the Acrílico Paolini competition used the mural format but the context of each mural is very different. In the first case the political struggle of the streets violently intruded into the exhibition space where the competition was being held, while in the second the artwork was located in a space that affirms a political consensus. The context therefore remains essential to an understanding of the political in relation to art. But it is not just the socio-political or historical context that is essential for an understanding of the work, but also the form of the display itself. Both pieces are murals, the dominant medium of political art in Latin America from the time of the Mexican Revolution, but the differences between them are considerable, with a shift from activism to "monumentalism". Both include a list of the dead plus representations of blood to denote the pain. In the "proceso a nuestra realidad" the work refers to the threat of action; in the case of the piece sent to Havana it is a record, a memory of the struggle. There is a shift from Argentinian dissent to Cuban consensus, from social and political struggle to the creating of political iconography. The question revolves around how to maintain the critical power of art in Cuba, because denying art the power of resistance, the right to challenge or interrogate or indeed to mock, is to deny its essence, the possibility of independent creativity.

The art which committed artists such as Ferreira Gullar was defending in Brazil<sup>8</sup> was that which Ana Longoni has described as "pamphlet art",<sup>9</sup> an art of political propaganda raised to the status of a high or fine art. For this reason Gullar himself could not admit the compatibility between the vanguard and political compromise, because the subjectivity and experimentation of the vanguard cannot be tamed or subordinated to the ideology of a particular party. This argument was vigorously defended by those who denied the possibility of a political

art in Brazil in the seventies, such as Roberto Schwarz. Fidel Castro in his famous speech of 1961, "Palabras a los intelectuales", "words to the intellectuals" spoke of the place of the intellectual in the Cuban political process with one of the most famous of all his pronouncements: Within the Revolution everything goes, against the Revolution nothing, no rights. As discussed by Ana Longoni, this language of consensus and the renunciation of art's autonomy is closely linked to the ethics of sacrifice<sup>10</sup>, and to what Claudia Gilman has called "anti-intellectualism as revolutionary subordinating directive", "el anti-intelectualismo como subordinación directiva revolucionaria". The case of the Cuban poet Heberto Padilla, imprisoned in 1971 for writing the "wrong" kind of poetry, created a dilemma for left-wing intellectuals in Latin America and around the world. The dominant polemic required individual and collective allegiance of everyone; but suddenly it was clear that any criticism of the Revolution would be interpreted as a betrayal, dividing international opinion, polarizing and radically strengthening the idea that one had to be either for or against the Revolution. It is therefore not surprising that consensus depended on omissions and silences, as Gilman demonstrates and Vindel discussed in his paper.

But as Gilman has pointed out, the Padilla case just added fuel to a critical debate that had been developing over several years. It revealed the cracks in the Left, both in Latin America and internationally, cracks that had been opened and explored in private discussions linked to new intellectual models.<sup>11</sup> So if we now return to our starting point: while May '68 was inspired in part by the revolutionary wave of Latin America, at the same time both Paris and Prague generated the need to create new models for the left. And surely then in turn, these changes initiated in Europe were fundamental to opening up another debate which exploded with the Padilla case, exposing the dissatisfaction of many intellectuals in the face of the subordination of culture to the necessities of the Revolution. In other words, we can argue that the Cuban Revolution and Guevara's project encouraged European demands for change in the face of the unitary and authoritarian visions of the traditional left, and that these Latin American sources were interpreted and incorporated according to geopolitical linkages specific to the old continent; but paradoxically it is also true that aspects of the critical movement around May '68 in Europe in turn influenced events in Latin America, resulting in the progressive fragmentation of the left during the seventies and the consolidation of a polarised division which put at risk the intercontinental Revolution itself.

Another example of the sorts of shifting context with which we are concerned can be seen in the famous image of Che Guevara based on a photograph by Alberto Korda, so popular on Cuban banners, and which after Che's death in 1967 spread like a virus around the world to become an icon of leftist demonstrations everywhere. Baddeley discussed how this debate was present in Europe when Charles Harrison, presenting an exhibition of British artists in New York in 1971, criticised the over-use of the Guevara image and questioned the supposed radicalism of those who referenced it in their work. Images,

like words and concepts, travel and accumulate different meanings, often becoming receptacles for contradictory ideas. In 1969 the Argentinian Roberto Jacoby also used the famous portrait for a poster entitled, with bitter sarcasm, "Un guerrillero no muere para que se lo cuelgue en la pared" (A guerrilla doesn't die to be hung on a wall), or, we could add, to decorate one's "engagement". Once again, we see differing engagements with an image - one belonging to a context of consensus, one to a context of struggle.

It is notable that today many different scholars are returning to theorists and artists of the sixties and seventies. It is as if this was the moment when theory had been able to achieve political agency and to have a substantive relationship with social struggle. As we have seen, one of the main concerns during this period was to understand the role of the intellectual élites within the struggle. It appears that we are today drawn back to these authors and their texts because of the current absence of analogous debates. At a conference chaired by Isabel Whitelegg at INTVA, the Institute of International Visual Arts in November 2010, Peter Hallward argued for the need to return to what he called the "anticolonial" texts from the seventies. For us, these accounts from the sixties and seventies can provide ways of critiquing current relationships between theory and action in politics, and of highlighting failures in the development of postcolonial theory and post-structuralism - particularly their dissociation from the domain of political action. Eduardo Grüner's conclusions, in situating the political position of Pasolini and Sartre, are similar:

This "style" of thinking and making art and culture is considerably more radical and questioning than the "rhizomatic dispersions" of so-called postmodernism, with its risk of a displacing of the dimension of violent domination and cultural conflict behind an exhilarated celebration of multicultural "differences". In our context of global capitalist crisis, it would be far from useless to return to thinkers like Sartre and Pasolini, who had the courage of confronting the sometimes unbearable tensions of cultural clash.

In short, maybe this perennial return to the sixties and seventies simply underlines our own failure to generate contemporary models for participation as academics engaging in social resistance. It might also provide inspiration and ideas as we look to overcome this failure and engage more thoroughly with the domain of political action.

#### Endnotes

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**Tucumán Arde, for example**  
Isobel Whitelegg  
(pages 34-46)

## Introduction

As Valerie Fraser indicates in the introduction to this dossier, the project Meeting Margins, Transnational Art in Europe & Latin America is one instance of an increasingly prevalent focus on border-crossing artistic exchange. Such exchanges are often recovered in order to dismantle nationally determined histories and schools of art. One impetus for proposing this project of research was that of observing the emergence of this phenomenon in relation to the field of Latin American art history, and wanting to contribute to it but also to scrutinise the premises and aporias of a marked turn from nation to relation.

The terms according to which this turn is articulated are often pacific – productive dialogue, meaningful influence, breaking down of borders. At first glance such terms may suggest proximity, and mutual comprehension. The circumstances in which art was produced and distributed during the period of time we have bracketed for analysis, however, mitigate proximity and immediate understanding. The institutionalisation of political repression in South American countries was – in enforcing or provoking migration – perversely generative of “transnational encounter”; but for every artist made available to Anglo-Saxon art history thanks to their exile, there is another who is obscured from the records by the marked withdrawal on political grounds of prominent European and North American critics from internationalist events in Latin American countries. The period under study is also one of burgeoning mass-communication, an augmented ability to comprehend events from a distance. The mediation of art and events makes information available but is also a mark of distance between production and reception, the witnessing of an action and its imaginative re-construction.

These two factors come together in the less visible channels by which art in Latin America conducted trans-national contact under political circumstances, for instance through the international distribution and receipt of art works in the form of photographic or filmic register, performance score and documentation<sup>1</sup>. Such forms of circulation underscore the gap between work and reception; rather than viewing “encounter” as synchronous meeting in the space of the shared event, there is a deferral, a gap between sending and receiving, an impossibility of direct contact that became in itself a space that could be inhabited poetically. One instance of such a practice is the project “Incluir os Excluídos” – mounted by the Brazilian artists Francisco Ifarra, Genilson Soares and Lygia Okumura for the *Jovem Arte Contemporânea* at the *Museu de Arte Contemporânea* in 1972 – for which the artists solicited and developed proposals by absent international artists (including Jannis Kounellis, Jean-Jacques Castex and Erika Steinberger – with the addition of the impromptu “*Titulo Pra Um Projeto Ausente*”, a response to the unanticipated action of waiting for a proposal by Daniel Buren to arrive).

Any ephemeral event as object of art historical study – from performance to happening to exhibition – requires reconstruction from an assemblage of evidence that may or not include living memory of

the experience itself. The task of writing a passing event into history takes place in the absence of the insistent trans-historical presence of the discrete and enduring artwork. With respect to the recovery of time-bound work, and especially work explicitly contingent to political circumstance, the work of an art historian may collapse into a speculative version of the conventional forms of enquiry of the historian in general - re-assembling the lost social context that is integral to that work's form and - it may be assumed - its meaning, intent and efficacy.

As is also evidenced by Michael Asbury's contribution to this dossier, historiography has emerged as a primary concern of Meeting Margins, Transnational Art in Europe and Latin America. At the far reach of our aims is the objective of the writing of art history away from the points normally relied on to narrate the development of post-war art; when the project was drafted, this entailed a deliberate geographical shift - the decision to focus on Europe and Latin America, in counter-balance to the habitual reliance on New York as the pole of critical art in the post-war years. As a project concerned with trans-nationality it also implies a second shift: away from activities accrued within certain sustained centres, towards the processes that form point-to-point links - the development of networks, the extension and differentiation of spheres of influence, the production of imaginaries. A consequence has been a marked focus on particular types of art historical object; often, the case studies on which we rely are ideas or works in circulation, as well as temporary formations - events such as critical meetings or exhibitions.

The exhibition may be presupposed to be generative event par excellence for the types of process favoured by a transnational historiography. The exhibition is - traditionally - predisposed to both enhanced visibility, and international mediation. In line with the "living contact" desired by the first São Paulo Bienal, an exhibition may provide excuse, site and platform for planned or accidental encounters between normally dispersed agents, creating localised affects while being projected towards - and creating - an international public sphere. Thus an exhibition may be an event necessary to sustaining networks, augmenting visibility, allowing influence to occur.

But as an assemblage of local events and trans-national projections the exhibition, or event, also sets in motion relations characterised by difference, conflict or contradiction.

#### Learning from Tucumán

The part of the Meeting Margins conference entitled "Tucumán Arde, for example" was a means of thinking through some of the implications of addressing events and exhibitions as historiographical focal points, or as case studies for our research. It also began from a consideration of how the paradigmatic status of Tucumán Arde might impinge on our interpretative expectations when considering other examples of practice that were operative at the same time and beneath similar conditions - the institutionalisation of political

repression and, concomitantly, neoliberal economic policy. Our project of research is also coincident with a critical extension of the discipline of art history, namely an emergent interest in addressing the exhibition as a distinct formation, considering the possibility of narrating a history of art that places such formations at its centre and also the methodological challenges inherent to this reconstructive form of historiography. As such, it is a field of activity that may be informative to the challenges of Meeting Margins.

The extent to which Latin American landmarks appear within canonical exhibition history is largely limited to that region's most emblematic biennales - São Paulo and Havana. In terms of scrutiny placed on a single rather than a cyclical event, Tucumán Arde is the prevailing Latin American example to have been drawn into to exhibition studies and cognate fields. Tucumán Arde was a collective project of political action that took place in Argentina in late 1968. Two exhibitions, one staged for two weeks at the headquarters of the TGT trade union in Rosario, another staged at the same union's Buenos Aires HQ and closed within days, were elements of a project that deliberately sought to subvert other available means of putting information into public circulation<sup>7</sup>.

Alongside other activities - documentation and the circulation of leading and misleading information, via the press, fly-posting, graffiti and advertisement - the Tucumán Arde exhibitions are of interest to researchers concerned with that distinct spatio-temporal form. The taking place of an exhibition as an occupation of the offices of a political organisation together with a distinct combination of overlaid, jarring, and aggressive forms of sensory stimuli, allows Tucumán Arde to be appropriated within a critical genealogy of curatorial practice. As an exhibition, what Tucumán Arde sought to expose - rather than works of art - was a present situation (the reality) of the province of Tucumán. The actions of Tucumán Arde were intended as a process of counter-information that would subvert the promotion of "Operación Tucumán" - the name given to a series of measures promoting industry, and diversifying agriculture, launched by the Onganía dictatorship in 1966. The sugar mills that had provided work for a large part of the population of Tucumán were closed down. While the government were promoting it as "Tucumán, Garden of the Republic" the region had slid into severe poverty.

Our reasons for drawing the example of Tucumán Arde into the frame of Meeting Margins were two-fold. As well as addressing its immovable exemplarity and mythic status, we wanted to consider how it was apprehended trans-nationally at the time of its making and, from this, to consider the fact that no matter however proximate the time between occurring in Argentina and becoming influential to critical thinkers elsewhere, the event itself could not be substituted by its imaginative reconstruction - informed by the demands of the different critical contexts into which it was drawn. The rapid slippage of event into discourse or "meaningful influence" has continued more recently in forms that have been

problematic. Tucumán Arde has variously been requested to appear as exemplar of Latin American conceptualism, or – via its persistence circulation as archival documentation in the context of contemporary internationalist exhibitions – as an artwork.

Prior to successive re-discoveries, over the past decade, and its persistent circulation as archival documentation within the context of contemporary globalised exhibitions, Tucumán Arde had impinged upon two prominent thinkers in two prominent places, Lucy Lippard in New York and Jean Clay in Paris, each of whom had entered into contact with the artists involved in Tucumán Arde<sup>3</sup> while in Buenos Aires for other (and more internationalist) reasons, having both been invited to participate in the jury of the September 1968 salon "Materials, New Techniques, New Expressions". There is an element of serendipity to this meeting – but it is also indicative of the fact that although the Tucumán Arde artists expressed commitment to national activism and with it a turning away from the internationalist impetus represented by Buenos Aires' cosmopolitan institutions, they did not conceal their project from an already established international interest in the Argentine avant-garde.

Lucy Lippard has remained a consistent contributor to the critical memory of Tucumán Arde. Reference to her 1968 visit to Argentina is made, at various points, within her celebrated publication *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. In "Escape Attempts", the essay that introduces that book, she gives considerable weight to the experience, as her "second branch of access to what became Conceptual Art", one whose affect was that of returning to New York "belatedly radicalized" by the "mixture of political and conceptual ideas" to which she had been exposed. More recently, she has stated: "this was the first time I had heard artists say that they were not going to make art until the world was changed for the better. It made a profound impression on me."<sup>4</sup>

In Lippard's case, the event of influence occurred in the transition from subjective radicalization into a new apprehension of how she as an artist should or could act within her own local milieu, New York. It might be seen as a flashpoint without which a committed involvement in the Art Worker's Coalition (AWC), and Artists and Writers Protest (AWP) soon after her return might otherwise have not occurred – even without which actions such as the 1969 "Mass Anti-War Mail-in" may not have pushed artistic practice further towards the frisson of direct action. As examined in "Les Sud-Américains de Paris: Latin American Artists and Cultural Resistance in *Robho Magazine*", a recent article by Isabel Plante,<sup>5</sup> Jean Clay's affective response to meeting some of the artists who were to be involved in the realization of Tucumán Arde would appear to be equally strong. Soon after returning to Paris, Clay wrote to Julio le Parc, relaying plans to publish an Argentinian version of *Robho* (the magazine that he co-edited with poet Julien Blaine) in partnership with the Buenos-Aires based cultural promoter Jorge Glusberg – a figure whose political position differed significantly from that expressed by Tucumán Arde. This enterprise was to begin with

artists connected directly or indirectly to Tucumán Arde ("the group of Margerita Paksa and Pablo Suárez: very exciting!").<sup>6</sup>

That idea did not materialize; but in its place was the incorporation of the "Dossier Argentine: Tucumán brûlé. Les fils de Marx et Mondrian" in a 1971 double-edition of *Robho* that also included a parallel focus on practices exploring perception – including the work of Oiticica, Gerchman, John Dugger and Lygia Pape. Tucumán Arde was for Clay another instance of the same "geological fissure" – one he perceived to be opening up beneath "commodity civilization and the aesthetics it has engendered". For Clay, this was a fissure that ran across borders (or at least connected the dispersed practices that he himself had encountered): "From Vietnam theatre to Puerto Rican theatre in New York, passing through the Argentine radicals, the Brazilian Tropicalists, the Exploding Galaxy of London."<sup>7</sup>

Each case was, for Clay, motivated by the same anti-imperialistic, anti-capitalistic rupture, from which "new values are born: collective and mass action, non-property, spontaneity, direct capture of the real".<sup>8</sup> Clay's identification of Tucumán Arde as the work of sons of Mondrian and Marx occurred in the wake of a newly radicalized tone taken by *Robho*. As Isabel Plante observes, the cover of the first issue published post-May 68 not only featured a non-art photograph (an athlete raising his fist in salute to the Black Panthers on the winners' podium of the 1968 Olympics in Mexico) but abandoned its previous geometrical symmetry in favour of juxtaposing that image with the identifying statement "theatre guerrilla" – presented in white on black type, pasted at a deliberately careless angle.

The adoption of a different aesthetic for the cover was echoed by an alteration in content – less geometric and kinetic work, more documentation of recent experiences in art and theatre. This issue accelerated an already established concern with retrieving and retaining the critical power of kineticism and other practices of constructivist origin, including the propositions, experiments and ways of working exemplified by the recent work of artists such as Clark, Oiticica and David Medalla, experiences that were, importantly for Clay, incompatible with capitalist imperialism and commodity-fetishism.

#### **Tucumán Arde is a café-bar on Rivadavia 380, Pilar, Buenos Aires'**

Clay and Lippard's attraction to the "Argentine radicals" became a means to identify, or motivate, a heightened political edge, with regard to practices in their more immediate milieux. As such, each instigates a complication of the more recent mobilization of Tucumán Arde as example of Latin American conceptualism placed in opposition to de-politicized, "tautological" or "analytical" British and North American conceptual art. The origin of this rhetorical device was the North American curator Mari Carmen Ramírez's appropriation of the term "ideological conceptualism", as used in 1974 by both Jorge Glusberg<sup>9</sup> and the Spanish art historian Simón Marchán Fiz – the latter of whom she cites.

Ideological vs. tautological was an interpretative formula first used by Ramírez in the essay "Blueprint Circuits: Conceptual Art and Politics

in Latin America", the catalogue text for the MOMA-curated 1992 exhibition *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*. As is noted by Miguel A. López in the recent essay "How Do We Know What Latin American Conceptualism Looks Like?",<sup>11</sup> it was one repeated, with minimal adjustment, in texts for two later shows, "Global Conceptualism" (Queens Museum, New York, 1999) and "Inverted Utopias" (Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 2004). The need to confer "unitary legibility" upon dispersed practices was set by the shared purpose of each version of the essay, exhibitions concerned with Latin American Art<sup>12</sup> (a domain that Ramirez commonly addresses with a proprietary "ours"). "Blueprint Circuits" also served a function of pressing urgency within Ramirez' own immediate milieu; she was writing against a common assumption that Latin American conceptual art was belated and imitative version of an original Anglo-US invention. López has interpreted her intentions as the hope for a politicization of conceptualism that could also assign "positive value to an apparent Latin American difference".<sup>13</sup>

The blind spots of this binary opposition have been raised by several critics, including – to name those that were present at our conference discussion – Miguel A. López, Jaime Vindel, Olga Fernández López and Zanna Gilbert. But, as Miguel A. López' aforementioned essay also indicates, it is not this interpretation itself that is "wrong". The error is perhaps that of a lack of attention on the part of those who have succumbed to its very persuasiveness. The content of a catalogue essay – that is, a text commissioned to serve specific purposes, for author and institution – has been taken up and re-applied as an easily available normative category, within mainstream revisions of conceptual art.<sup>14</sup> This is troubling not only because the Latin American supplement of political difference appears to be treated, at times, as "mystifying cliché" but also because this is binary logic that forestalls the need to recover the politicized history of British or American versions of conceptualism; it solicits a displacement of political or ethical responsibility, to the safety of a far-away, exotically repressive or impoverished place.

While the case of Lippard and Clay may provide a generative exception to this problematic rule, the very enthusiasm of their readings – alongside those of Ramirez and others – prevents properly critical scrutiny of the action of Tucumán Arde itself. To again quote López, "the struggle of Latin American historiography to place local episodes within global narratives, in an attempt to counter the dominant geographies of art, has been successful".<sup>15</sup> Uncritical celebration is no longer a required strategy.

Characteristic of the readings presented by both Jaime Vindel and Olga Fernández López, in the context of our conference, is the need – and present ability – to address the subject of Tucumán Arde critically, in terms of some of the blind spots of the action itself. Both presentations were also informed by looking more directly at what – in material rather than rhetorical terms – is available to us in the present as its history. From the perspective of distinct disciplinary approaches, their contributions each constitute a return to the difficult question

of precisely what it is that we are referring to by "Tucumán Arde" – aside from a name that has acquired the immaterial agency of myth. Jaime Vindel's contribution addressed the relation between the value ascribed to Tucumán – by Ramirez and more recently by Luis Camnitzer's study *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: didactics of liberation* (2007) – and a pedagogical conception of art which itself leans upon a model of communicative efficacy: "An ideal of transparency" in which "spectators are reduced to 'passive consumers of self-evident meanings' or recipients of a message that urges them to imitate the behavioural patterns that are played out for them."<sup>16</sup> As Vindel stated:

Without belittling the overall importance of avant-garde Latin American conceptualist experiences such as Tucumán Arde, they nevertheless revealed the paradoxes and violence of communicative logic, given that the artists proclaimed themselves spokespersons of the emancipatory interests of the people, whose awareness they tried to raise without much reflection. According to this contradiction [ ] the effectiveness of art could only come about – if at all – when the recipient mirrored the intentions of those it issued from.<sup>17</sup>

The value of Tucumán as judged by the paradigm of effective reception is therefore precarious; a circumvention presented by Vindel was that of a shift from viewing it in terms of reception, to viewing the action as the production of knowledge:

Irrrespective of the declared intentionality of the artists, this is a much more reasonable approach when it comes to giving an account of projects such as Tucumán Arde, in which the amount of material compiled meant that its reception could only be partial – in the double sense of the word. There is, in fact, always an irreducible gap between the artist's intention and the spectator's reception, which is at odds with the communicative model of political art and its tendency to presuppose that its messages are fully understood, in a projection of the ideal self-awareness of the artist onto the spectator. We can thus claim that there was not one single Tucumán Arde, but rather multiple readings of an archive that is of greater pedagogic and political importance than any professed predetermination of its effects. This allows us to approach the 1960s Tucumán Arde exhibitions as physical expressions of the montage of an archive that was put together following a process of field work, a "way of doing" that subsequent practices would return to again and again.<sup>18</sup>

An important repercussion of this argument is that it shifts the weight of responsibility to the custodians of the body of produced knowledge that Tucumán Arde, as archive, represents. Although parts of this archive have been mounted on the walls of exhibition venues, numerous times, it remains difficult to ascertain what we are looking at, or indeed what a curator might hope to be taking

place, when a series of selected photographs and documents are posted on the walls of a themed biennale or Documenta (at times helpfully enlarged, so that they may approximate the familiar visual experience of a discrete painting or photograph).<sup>23</sup> The currency of the name "Tucumán Arde" itself might mean that we are in fact simply seeing the apparition of a cliché – not reading the archival fragments in front of us, but rather projecting upon them all that they have been asked to represent.

Olga Fernández López' engagement with Tucumán Arde arises from a concern with the specificities of the exhibition medium, and a critical engagement with the history of exhibitions and genealogy of curatorial practice. As such, her presentation focused decisively on one phase of the process – its materialisation as exhibition. In conjunction with Vindel's critique of recent exhibitions of Tucumán's archival remains, this is an approach that raises a point that is obvious – but also worthy of consideration. Tucumán Arde exhibited itself – or became-exhibition – as one part of its programmatic development yet the distinct strategies of visibility used in Rosario and Buenos Aires are rarely retrieved in the process of the archive of Tucumán Arde becoming exhibition or artwork in the context of current curatorial practice.

Fernández López' ability to re-imagine the specific configuration of the Tucumán Arde exhibitions rested on iconic images of the two events, together with a narrative created by a journalist writing for the TGT union's magazine. This "virtual visit" to the short-lived Buenos Aires edition emphasises the experience as an emotional journey: inaugurated by the acerbic advertisement "Visit Tucumán: Garden of Misery" at the entrance, continued through the overlaying of conflicting sounds in the first room – an "unusual atmosphere that disconcerts and intrigues whoever comes off-guard"<sup>24</sup> – and reaching a peak in the transformation of the ninth floor meeting room into a film theatre where,

Over a modest white cloth, a 10 minute documentary film was screened, showing images of the dismantled factories, the abandoned villages and the impoverished inhabitants. After the screening, a 12 minute diaporama showed the photographs taken by the team who went to Tucumán, synchronized with a recorded interview to the son of Hilda Guerrero, the unionist killed in one of Tucumán's demonstrations.<sup>25</sup>

As Fernández López acknowledged, her effort to retrieve Tucumán Arde as exhibition is an exercise of imagination based upon reading between the lines of a partisan journalistic account, together with looking at a series of iconic installation shots. This acknowledgement of the re-constructive process of re-imagining a spatio-temporal event was brought together with the observation that, for certain of the artists involved in the realization of the project, the myth of communicative efficacy addressed by Vindel was upheld too by a blind faith in the indexicality of the photograph as a means of documenting their subjects.<sup>26</sup> Photographs of devastated people and

places were approached as a direct and unmediated imprint of the reality of Tucumán, recalling Jean Clay's enthusiastic endorsement of these children of Mondrian and Marx' ability to engage in "direct capture of the real".<sup>27</sup>

As such, the motivation of artists involved in Tucumán to distribute – after the end of the project – a dossier of documentation to critics such as Lippard and Clay might have been precisely that of wanting to spread information not as the promotion of a radical aesthetic experiment, but as a demand for recognition beyond Argentina of a situation engendered by neo-liberalist measures – a politics in which Europe and the USA are also implicated.

### **Tucumán Arde is a happening that did not take place**

A further complication to the question of what, or rather whom, we are addressing by Tucumán Arde, is its status as a collective project, involving 31 named artists,<sup>28</sup> as well as anonymously remembered mass of students, activists, and union-leaders. Even in the process of identifying an apparently blind adherence to myths of communicative efficacy and photographic indexicality – Tucumán Arde might be being treated as a concerted voice, a mass conceived as single historical subject (such as, for Vindel and Fernández López, the people of Tucumán were for those artists). Tucumán Arde did represent the first product of a unanimous decision, to break from art into direct action: but might it not also be necessary to consider that rupture does not imply amnesia, the forgetting of the previous practices and concepts of the individual artists involved. In this, it is tempting to call the words of Roberto Jacoby to witness, as articulated in relation to a 1966 episode of the Argentine avant-garde, the first works of the group *Arte de los Medios*:<sup>29</sup>

In a mass civilisation, people are not in direct contact with cultural events. For example, a mass audience does not see an exhibition, attend a Happening, or go to a soccer game, but it does see footage of the event on the news. Actual artistic events are no longer important in terms of their diffusion, because they only reach a limited audience [...] in the final analysis, it is of no interest to information consumers if an exhibition took place or not; all that matters is the image of the artistic event constructed by the media.<sup>30</sup>

This statement related to the realisation of "Happening for a Dead Wild Boar". A work occurring within and using media ostensibly associated with the real (photographs, witness accounts, newspaper articles) this was a programmatic construction of a myth, a factual account of a Happening that did not take place. It was not a "moral critique about the way the mass media functioned" nor a "joke on journalism" but, as Jacoby has stated, it spoke to:

the paradox between the characteristics of the Happening (the lack of mediation, direct communication with objects and persons, short distance between the viewer and the viewed) and a great deal of mediation between the objects and events, the non-participation of the receptor; in short,

the conditions imposed by the mass media as a means of communication.<sup>27</sup>

It is interesting to consider Jacoby's investigation of the "play between the reality of things and the unreality of information, between the reality of information and the unreality of things"<sup>28</sup> in relation to the fact that it was he who mailed a dossier of information on Tucumán Arde to Jean Clay in Paris. Did the demand of political necessity enforce a suspension of doubt concerning the reality and unreality of such information, and the reality and unreality of how the "things" of Tucumán would be received? Tucumán Arde was not a kitsch "Happening" of a stultified, decadent avant-garde, but it is nevertheless an event whose present reality derives from a set of material evidence similar to that carefully constructed by the *Arte de Los Medios* group in order to set the co-ordinates of a non-existent reality – oral reports, photographs, press articles. To again quote Jacoby:

the point is to think then of an art of objects that we are not yet prepared to imagine, the material of which must not be physical but social and whose form should be constructed through systematic transformation of common structures.<sup>29</sup>

For Jacoby, these are "objects, in short, that will be difficult to preserve in museums for future generations." I am not wishing to create a myth of my own, to suggest, in any serious way, that Tucumán Arde did not take place. It remains, however, an example of how a distant event has been made to appear firmly in the imagination, according to the "construction from data received" and "based on the meaning that data acquires".<sup>30</sup> The precarious, partisan nature of the material upon which the reality of Tucumán Arde rests brings it back into the realm of other unstable objects of our enquiry. These include the information and networks produced and made visible to different degrees by the actions and materials of *Nuevo Poesía*, *Poema-Proceso*, and the mail art exhibitions organised by artists such as Clemente Padín, Jorge Caraballo, Edgardo Antonio Vigo and Horacio Zabala – as addressed respectively by Fernanda Davies, Fernando Nogueira and Zanna Gilbert, three further contributors to the Meeting Margins conference whose studies remain unaddressed within the scope of this review.<sup>31</sup>

As such, the project Meeting Margins, Transnational Art in Europe and Latin America should not be understood as a mere revision of existing fields of knowledge according to a benign enthusiasm for the discovery of felicitous meetings – but also as a challenge to the epistemological ground of existing narratives, and an effort to reinscribe other trans-national processes and practices – including those which, by the operation of censorship, self-censorship, clandestine disguise, or simple neglect, are now retrieved in forms that place them in a doubtful terrain between possible fiction and possible fact. It is also an effort, in short, to emphasise the distances, differences, gaps and invisibilities persisting within the language of so-called transnational encounter.

## Endnotes

- 1 See, for example: Freire, Cristina. *Poéticos do Processo, Arte Conceitual no Museu*. São Paulo: Editora Iluminuras, 1999.
- 2 Tucumán Arde has accumulated an extensive bibliography; a detailed and comprehensive account is provided by Longoni, A. and Mestman, M., in: *Del Di Tella a Tucumán Arde: Vanguardia artística y política en el '68 argentino*, Buenos Aires: El cielo por asalto, 2000.
- 3 According to Longoni and Mestman (2000) the six artists met by Clay and Lippard were Pablo Suarez, Margarita Paksa, Leon Ferrari, Roberto Jacoby, Alfredo Rodríguez Arias and Juan Stoppini.
- 4 See Lucy Lippard, 'Curating by Numbers', in *Tate Papers* (Online), Landmark Exhibitions Issue, Autumn 2009. Available at: [http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/09autumn/lippard\\_shtm](http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/09autumn/lippard_shtm)
- 5 Plante, Isabel. *Les Sud-Américains de Paris: Latin American Artists and Cultural Resistance in Robho Magazine*, in: *Third Text* 105, Vol. 24, Issue 4, July 2010, p. 445-455.
- 6 Excerpt from a letter from Jean Clay to Julio Le Parc, 2 October 1968, cited in Plante (2010), p.454.
- 7 "Dossier Argentine: Tucumán Brule. Les Fils du Marx et Mondrian", *Robho* 5-6, second trimester, 1971, p. 16-22. Cited in Plante (2010) p. 453-4.
- 8 "Dossier Argentine: Tucumán Brule. Les Fils du Marx et Mondrian", cited in Plante (2010).
- 9 In a 2005 article for the Argentine journal *Ramona*, sub-titled "Tucumán Madre – the mother of all political works finally meets the fate of myths" Roberto Jacoby created an edited annotated list of versions of Tucumán he had discovered via a Google search, amongst many erroneous interpretations of the action itself, this included a café-bar named Tucumán Arde. See Roberto Jacoby, 'Tucucu mama nana arara dede dada', *Ramona*, no.55, October 2005, p.86-91.
- 10 Glusberg, Jorge. *Il Centro d'Arte e Comunicazione e il Gruppo dei Tredici di Buenos Aires*, in: *D'Ars*, año XV, n° 71-72, Milán, 1974. Cited in: Davis, Fernando. *Sentidos en tensión. Lecturas y recuperación de Tucumán Arde*, Inventario 1965-1975, Archivo Graciela Carnevale (Centro Cultural Parque de España, Rosario, 2008); available at: [http://radical.temp.si/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/catalogo\\_ta.pdf](http://radical.temp.si/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/catalogo_ta.pdf)
- 11 López, Miguel A.. *How do We Know What Latin American Conceptualism Looks Like?* *Afterall* 23, Spring 2010. Available at: <http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.23/how.do.we.know.what.latin.american.conceptualism.looks.likemiguella.López>
- 12 Global Conceptualism was composed of eleven geographically-specific shows. As Jaime Vindel comments, "the cartographic division of Global Conceptualism placed more importance on geopolitical or geographic borders than on the invention of the key ideas that cut across them" (Vindel, Jaime. *Struggling for memory: the case of Tucumán Arde*, paper drafted in Valparaíso, October 2010, and presented at the conference Meeting Margins, Transnational Art in Europe & Latin America, University of Essex, December 2010.)

13 López, *How do We Know What Latin American Conceptualism Looks Like?* 2010.

14 López cites the readings of Peter Osborne: "Ideological content" is the key term of Latin American Conceptual art. In distinction from the more formal ideational concerns of most US and European Conceptual art (the act/event, mathematical series, linguistic propositions or the structures of cultural forms), this was an art for which "ideology itself became the fundamental "material identity" of the conceptual proposition" (Osborne, Peter, *Conceptual Art, London and New York*, Phaidon Press, 2002, p.3) and Alexander Alberro. "The most extreme alternatives to models of analytic Conceptualism in the late 1960s and early 70s are those that developed in the deteriorating political and economic climate of a number of Latin American countries including Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Chile." (Alberro, Alexander. *Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966-1977*, in: Alberro A. and Stimson, B. (ed.), *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1999, p.xxv-xxvi).

15 López, *How do We Know What Latin American Conceptualism Looks Like?* 2010.

16 Vindel, *Struggling for memory: the case of Tucumán Arde*, 2010.

17 Vindel, 2010.

18 Vindel 2010.

19 Jaime Vindel cited *Inventario 1965-1975*, Archivo Graciela Carnevale (Centro Cultural Parque de España, Rosario, 2008) as an important exception to the rule of Tucumán Arde's archive being exhibited in a fetishized or aestheticised manner, as well as an explicit critique of some its previous exposure. *Inventario* is also addressed by López, *How do We Know What Latin American Conceptualism Looks Like?*, 2010. The catalogue to *Inventario* is available at: [http://radical.temp.si/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/catalogo\\_ta.pdf](http://radical.temp.si/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/catalogo_ta.pdf)

20 *Boletín CGT*, n. 31, 28 de noviembre de 1968, dirección de Raimundo Ongaro y Ricardo de Luca; quoted by Olga Fernández López, "Tucumán Arde: Ceci n'est pas une biennale", unpublished paper presented at the conference Meeting Margins, Transnational Art in Europe & Latin America, University of Essex, December 2010.

21 López, Olga Fernández. *Tucumán Arde: Ceci n'est pas une biennale*, unpublished paper presented at the conference Meeting Margins, Transnational Art in Europe & Latin America, University of Essex, December 2010.

22 Jaime Vindel has also addressed the photographic document in relation to Tucumán Arde: See: Vindel, *Treyakov in Argentina: Factography and Operativity in the Artistic Avant-Garde and the Political Vanguard of the Sixties*, available at: [http://eicpc.net/transversal/0910/vindel/en/#\\_ftnref4](http://eicpc.net/transversal/0910/vindel/en/#_ftnref4)

23 This view was supported Fernández López' quotation of the artist Noemí Escandell, who went to Tucumán to take photographs, complete interviews and assist the film-crew: "I remember that one of the discussions was about taking photographs. Why? Why did we need to paint if there was this other photographic connotation? Would it be

useful to paint the circumstances, when the circumstances were alive and real in Tucumán? What we needed to do was to go and document reality, even if we thought it was tough. Because it was going to be a counter-information, a living denouncement, and we needed to embody it. If we painted what we supposed, what it was or what it could become, it would remain in the terrain of allegory".

24 María Elvira de Arechaval, Beatriz Balbá, Graciela Borthwick, Aldo Bertolotti, Graciela Carnevale, Jorge Cohen, Rodolfo Elizalde, Noemí Escandell, Eduardo Favario, León Ferrari, Emilio Ghilioni, Edmundo Giura, Ma. Teresa Gramuglio, Martha Greiner, Roberto Jacoby, José Ma. Lavarello, Sara López Dupuy, Rubén Naranjo, David de Nully Braun, Raúl Pérez Cantén, Oscar Pidustwa, Estela Pomerantz, Norberto Puzulo, Juan Pablo Renzi, Jaime Ripa, Nicolás Rosa, Carlos Schork, Nora de Schork, Domingo J. A. Sapia, Roberto Zara.

25 The group *Arte de Los Medios* included the artists Jacoby, Eduardo Costa y Raúl Escari and the theorist Oscar Masotta.

26 Jacoby, R., Costa, E. and Escari, R. *An Art of Communications Media (manifesto)*. Written in July 1966, English translation published in: Katzenstein, I. (ed.) *Listen, Here, Now. Argentine Art of the 1960s. Writings of the Avant-Garde*, Buenos Aires/New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2004; p. 223.

27 Jacoby and Costa, *The creation of the first work*, in Katzenstein (ed.) 2004; p. 228.

28 Jacoby, *Against the Happening*, quoted by Longoni and Mestman, *After Pop, We Dematerialise*, in: Katzenstein (ed.) 2004; p167.

29 Jacoby, *Against the Happening*, 1966, p. 230.

30 Jacoby, Costa and Escari, 1966, in: Katzenstein (ed.) 2004; p223.

31 The three further papers presented were: Fernando Davies, "La Poesía Fuera de Sí. Poetic and Politics Strategies of the New Poetry Networks (1966-1972)"; Zanna Gilbert, "Mail Art's Expanded Exhibition: Flux, Multispatial Display and Exposure"; Fernanda Nogueira: *The Emancipatory Program of Poema/Processo in 60's and 70's Brazil*.

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