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**Latin American Conceptualism and the Problem of Ideology:
The Centro de Arte y Comunicación at the São Paulo Bienal, 1977**

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**Latin American Conceptualism and the Problem of Ideology:
The Centro de Arte y Comunicación at the São Paulo Bienal, 1977**

by

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Preface: The “Place of Dreams”

At the heart of a research project such as this is an archive. And at the heart of this particular research project is a question: what was the Centro de Arte y Comunicación? I have posed the question to the archive, grasping at its materiality for a useful answer. Like most archives, CAYC is a constellation, many things at once, now open to the cutting, dicing, arranging, and narrativizing that comprises the *process* of history. And like CAYC, the archive is partial, in both senses of the word. What makes an object archival, as Diana Taylor points out in her book *The Archive and the Repertoire*, is this mediation – the process whereby it is selected, classified, and presented for analysis. In pursuit of the question “what is the Centro de Arte y Comunicación?”, I thus began to see the archive itself as its answer.

At the University of Texas, archival material on CAYC is housed in the Benson Latin American Collection, and is comprised, principally, of catalogues, *gacetillas* (news bulletins), publications, and communications that the organization distributed systematically between 1969-1974. The collection, though substantial and well kept, is insufficient. Other partial archives, such as the digital one made available by the International Center for Arts of the Americas at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, reveal missing materials, different thematic preponderances, and continued production long after the year 1974. Often, I would sort through a handful of *gacetillas* at the Benson before finding precisely the one I needed, the juiciest and strongest morsel of evidence, elsewhere. What accounts for these gaps and shortcomings? Was it the source of these materials, the critic and CAYC founder Jorge Glusberg? Or was it the Huntington Gallery, an art museum at UT that he presumed would be interested in receiving them, given its then-rare interest in collecting art of Latin America? The cultural historian

Carolyn Steedman has written that “the Historian who goes to the Archive must always be an unintended reader, will always read that which was never intended for his or her eyes.”¹ But reading the *gacetillas* at the Benson Library, I could not help but feel that if I was not *the* intended reader, I was *an* intended reader. Glusberg produced these materials as a kind of readymade archive. Knowing that the Huntington Gallery was, at the time of their sending, part of the international network to which Glusberg envisioned contributing gave me a sense of a direct line of communication with him and CAYC.

Glusberg typed up each *gacetilla*, mailed them to the University of Texas, and, years later, I touch, read, and examine them. I wonder how many (how few?) other people have uncovered them in the Benson Library, considered the creases and stamps of receipt, catalogued the artists named, tracked the interests, priorities, values, and tendencies of the institution? Some are labeled with notes to a Pat Hendrix, a secretary at the Huntington Gallery, to file them under “Argentina.” I wonder about Pat Hendrix, and why she didn’t throw them away – as many others in this “network” seem to have done. Was she irritated by these unsolicited dispatches, as Luis Camnitzer seems to have been? Where were they filed, when were they bound, and how did they end up in my possession? I am pleased to be at an institution that saved them. On the other hand, what might be missing? Did a student intern opening the mail throw some away? What was the criteria determining which were worth keeping? Did Glusberg send some here, and others elsewhere? Why does the University of Texas have some, and the MFAH have others?

Surely, this is what Steedman meant when she wrote: “the Archive is a place of dreams.”²

¹ Steedman, *Dust*, 75.

² *Ibid.*, 69.

This dream extends not only through time, but also through space, to Buenos Aires. I imagine Glusberg at a typewriter, with a cigarette, scratching his beard as he tears the sheet out to start over again on an English translation. Or did he ask another artist, maybe someone with better English, to write out the translations? Did his secretary – the one whom I have heard was an iron curtain around the telephone – type the *gacetillas* and sign them with his initials, “J.G.”? Did she decide, sometimes, how big the font would be, which color paper to use, how to fold them? Were there meetings to discuss the content of each *gacetilla*? More likely, in my imagination, Glusberg whipped them off, maybe three or four in a sitting, without asking anyone. Did other artists ever object to what he wrote? How should I interpret Glusberg’s beliefs, which are evident in the archive, and how should I consider the likely diverse but now silent internal opinions about what CAYC was? How much should I consider the opinions of his many detractors, his well-known reputation as something between a self-promoter and charlatan?

These questions indicate the inseparability of Glusberg from the organization he founded. My contact with the archive is as mediated by him as by Pat Hendrix or anyone else. But it was the work of the Grupo de los Trece, the core group of artists associated with CAYC, which won international recognition and points backward, now, to CAYC as institution. A spirit of collectivity was, of course, crucial to the production of social spaces and tactics of resistance to dictatorship. Was it the Grupo de los Trece that defined CAYC? Or does CAYC only exist to the degree that it has already been recognized in the writing of Latin American art history? If so, how do the gaps in those histories – rarely acknowledged women artists like Mirtha Dermisache and Lea Lublin, for example – delimit the historical significance of CAYC? The peculiarities of archival materials allow for recovery and reinterpretation of these gaps. In the passing of information from the

archive – from Glusberg, from the *gacetillas*, from Pat Hendrix, to me – these gaps and slippages result in new interpretations of CAYC. And it is these ruptures, as the Deconstructionists argue, that reveal the stitching together of a historical narrative. It is for this reason that I believe the answer to the question “what is the Centro de Arte y Comunicación?” is the same as the answer to the question, “what is an archive?” In its partiality – its biases and its shortcomings – this thesis is proof.

Abstract

Latin American Conceptualism and the Problem of Ideology: The Centro de Arte y Comunicación at the São Paulo Bienal, 1977

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

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In 1977, a group exhibition of the Argentine Centro de Arte y Comunicación (CAYC), won the Itamaraty Grand Prize at the XIV São Paulo Bienal, the first given to a Latin American entry in the Bienal's 27-year history. Though the group had refused to participate in prior years, the Bienal's organizing body had this time solicited its participation with the objective of "securing a more prominent presence of Latin America through [CAYC's] participation in the São Paulo Bienal." The award was controversial, sparking allegations of government cooperation and the withdrawal of works by some artists. It also reveals much about the politics of production, circulation, and display at this under-examined moment in Latin America. As a peak of international recognition for a group that had, since its formation, explicitly aimed to insert its work (and that of its "region") into global circuits, CAYC's exhibition at the São Paulo Bienal illuminates both the history of a group that is often overlooked and its important relationship to narratives of Latin American conceptual art. So what was the Centro de Arte y

Comunicación, and why was its presence so critical to the success of the XIV São Paulo Bienal?

This project focuses on CAYC's exhibition at the XIV São Paulo Bienal as a lens through which to examine the group's fundamental role in the development of a "Latin American" brand of conceptual art and its absorption into international narratives of display and criticism. By historicizing CAYC's role as an institutional space for conceptual practices in the 1970s, I hope to draw larger conclusions about its important role in the construction of an international narrative about the development of Conceptualism and/in Latin American art history.

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Introduction: “What is the CAYC?”

In October 1977, the Grupo CAYC of the Buenos Aires-based Centro de Arte y Comunicación won the Itamaraty Grand Prize at the XIV São Paulo Bienal, the first given to a Latin American entry in the Bienal’s 27-year history. Though the group had refused to participate in prior years, in solidarity with international boycotts of the São Paulo Bienal and its associations with the official culture of South American military dictatorships, the Bienal’s organizing body had this time solicited its participation with the objective of “securing a more prominent presence of Latin America through [CAYC’s] participation in the São Paulo Bienal.”³ The award was controversial, sparking allegations of government cooperation and the withdrawal of works by some artists. The award, as a catalytic and contested moment, is also revealing of the politics of production, circulation, and display during an often-overlooked period in Latin American art. As a peak of international recognition for a group that had, since its formation, explicitly aimed to insert its work (and that of its “region”) into global circuits, CAYC’s exhibition at the São Paulo Bienal illuminates both the history of an underexamined group of artists and its important relationship to narratives of Latin American conceptual art.

Writing on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Centro de Arte y Comunicación, Glusberg pinpoints a visit by Polish theatre theorist Jerzy Grotowski⁴ as the birth of the CAYC group, also known as the Grupo de los Trece:

³ Fundación OSDE, *Arte de sistemas*, 84.

⁴ Grotowski, a Polish director who theorized experimental theatre through the local traumas of World War II, developed the influential concepts of “poor theatre.” In his 1968 book *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Grotowski argues that theatre should not strive to compete against the spectacle of film but rather focus on the relationships central to its ontology: actors co-creating the event with its spectators. Emphasizing that the actor’s role can only be completed through an encounter with the spectator, Grotowski envisioned “poor theatre” as therapeutic in its participatory politics. Drawing on analytical psychology, he also believed in the therapeutic potential of the rituals of theatre to release a collective unconscious. While his

on Friday, November 12, 1971, from 11 a.m. until 4 p.m., at CAYC headquarters, we had invited him to listen to him and debate his ideas. The extended talk by Grotowski and the dialogue with him which followed – outside our hall, a car was waiting for him, since from there he was scheduled to leave for Ezeiza airport to undertake the return trip to Poland – were the origin of the CAYC Group. Because, days later, we sent out twenty-five invitations to as many visual artists to form a work team in the manner of the Grotowski “laboratory.”⁵

If Grotowski’s 1971 visit marked the birth of the CAYC Group of artists, however, the conception of CAYC as an institution might be traced to the formative exhibition *Arte y Cibernética* at the Galería Bonino, August–September 1969, or perhaps, as Glusberg mentions in the following sentence, to group conversations and “guiding thoughts” of August 1968. A critic and businessman who owned the lighting company Modulor, Glusberg established what he originally called the Centro de Estudios de Arte y Comunicación (CEAC). Its express objective was to support and develop research and experimentation in the areas of art and communication, based on interdisciplinary inquiry of artists, architects, designers, musicians, mathematicians, semioticians and other professionals.⁶ *Arte y Cibernética*, Glusberg’s first exhibition, featured work by artists and engineers working with automatic drawing machines and plotters connected to IBM computers. It followed Jasia Reichardt’s landmark exhibition *Cybernetic Serendipity* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, one year earlier. In a catalog essay, Glusberg theorizes about cybernetics and robotics, synthesizes art and computers, and, importantly, asserts the newly formed CAYC as an important participant in exploring their intersections.⁷

ideas resonated with communications, linguistic, and performance theorists of the time and were influential in the study of ancient performative rituals of South America, they also supported the emergent principles of conceptual art; namely, the shifting hierarchies of creation to privilege the viewer’s constitutive encounter with a work.

⁵ *CAYC Group at the Museum of Rio de Janeiro*, 4.

⁶ Sarti, “Grupo CAyC.”

⁷ *Ibid.*

In our time, humans are mobilized geographically and socially, and it is for this reason that the artist of our time is interested fundamentally in the *process* that initiates his work more than the object that finishes it. His aim is not a fixed attitude, nor a definitive relation, but a network of uncertainties, ambiguities, a field in which nothing is fixed. The artist of this time is more interested in behavior than in the essence of things, and this tendency is distinctly identified with cybernetic vision.⁸

Even in this first exhibition, Glusberg establishes the organizing principles that would shape CAYC exhibitions and programming: projects and proposals that synthesized interdisciplinary interests under a framework of experimental art. Two other early shows, *Argentina Inter-Medios* (also in 1969) and *De la figuración al arte de sistemas* (1970), exemplified a combined approach to performance, urban and ecological interventions, music, poetry, film, and objects. The catalog text for *De la figuración al arte de sistemas* traces parallels and affinities across the history of art, making use, for the first time, of the term “system” as a theoretical thread binding such diverse proposals.

These early endeavors complicate scholarly points of entry. CAYC was, for most of its existence, an institution, performing the legitimizing functions of the gallery, museum, university, or think tank. It was sometimes a “school,” home to the Escuela de Altos Estudios and part of an international lecture circuit for traveling public intellectuals. It was also an art collective, with shifting membership over a period of about a decade, working in the manner of the “Grotowski laboratory” and experimenting with utopian methodologies and group dynamics. It was a publishing house, an exhibition space, and at times it seems to have been a protected space for dissident thought and radical art practices during the most politically repressive decade in Argentina’s history. It was the source of what Glusberg called “*gacetillas*,” or news bulletins sent to a network of art institutions with which CAYC sought to engage (see fig. 1). Of all of these

⁸ Glusberg, “Arte y Cibernética.” Translation mine.

overlapping roles and functions, the *gacetillas* serve as physical evidence of the core of CAYC's self-conceptualization as a star in a geographic constellation of international art institutions. These real and imagined circuits to which Glusberg sought admission both guided CAYC's institutional values and curatorial strategies – as I will discuss in the first section of this paper – and – as I will discuss in the second – the way it came to represent Argentine conceptual art abroad and in art history. I argue that Glusberg made appropriative use of existing labels such as “conceptual,” “political,” and “ideological” to guide international interpretation of CAYC works. Such labels, as they circulated with CAYC's art geographically and temporally, have delimited the reception and understanding of CAYC as representative of political art. CAYC's written communications, as well as its presence at the 1977 São Paulo Bienal, illustrate the process by which these narratives solidify, in spite of Glusberg's early assertion that the CAYC artist “is not a fixed attitude, nor a definitive relation, but a network of uncertainties, ambiguities, a field in which nothing is fixed.”

My analysis of CAYC's institutional values and curatorial strategies will be rooted in a discursive analysis of the hundreds of *gacetillas* Glusberg sent to the Huntington Gallery at the University of Texas (now held at the Benson Library) over the course of a decade. Looking at the *gacetillas* as an archive of self-fashioning, I will in my first chapter compare how Glusberg curated and wrote about exhibitions at CAYC with how CAYC presented itself in international exhibitions. Specifically, I am interested in the imperative – or perhaps ambivalent – role of politics in the art and exhibitions of CAYC, and the ways in which politics have come to define “Latin American” conceptual art. In my second chapter I will home in on one exhibition, CAYC's prize-winning submission to the 1977 São Paulo Bienal, to think about how interpretations of CAYC's conceptual art change across historical and historiographical contexts. In much the same

way as the *gacetillas* do, the São Paulo Bienal bridges and contains the tension between the local/international concerns of CAYC.

The tension between the local and international might be the defining discursive frame for narratives of Argentine art history. Argentina's self-modeling as a nation of European immigrants and tradition of elite patronage of the arts, which supported training and education in Europe, have informed the construction of a historiographical dialectic in which the cultural production of Argentina has tracked, at a delay, developments in Europe. The predominance of such an implicit hierarchy has motivated Argentina's internalized anxieties about its peripherality, and, in turn, a conservatism of cultural values that dates back to its colonial history. It is within this historical apparatus that Marta Traba, among others, has situated CAYC in Argentine art history: as a continuation of a tradition of "artificial" assimilation of global trends.

On the other hand, Argentina's close relationship to Europe has supported centuries of dialogic exchange, and Buenos Aires' position as a cultural capital of South America has always given Argentine art history an international, rather than provincial, gaze. In the mid-century, following the removal of the populist president Juan Domingo Perón, cultural institutions and producers in Buenos Aires took advantage of increased freedoms to pursue international visibility and an improved global position for Argentina's art scene. Narratives of this project of internationalization (rather than exchange), based on demonstrated fluency in the languages of abstraction, and later, experimentation, have implied the primacy of one aesthetic model over another. In narratives with a more recuperative focus, conceptualism represents the autochthonous development of experimental art in response to a unique set of cultural conditions. If Argentine art history had previously been defined by a bourgeois taste for academic painting and a tardy arrival to modernist abstraction, CAYC told a different story of an

small but dedicated avant-garde that has always thrived in Buenos Aires, engaging but not necessarily chasing international art movements. Much of Latin American art history reproduces this top-down approach, emphasizing the international effects on the local rather than the reverse. Indeed, the founding of Museums of Modern Art in Buenos Aires and São Paulo actively emulated New York's model in hopes of achieving a similar reorientation of hegemonic centers. Biennials and awards were designed not only to bring international styles to South America, but also to promote Latin American art on a global stage. As I will discuss, CAYC's international aspirations frequently aligned with these efforts; it sponsored art prizes and residencies and participated in several biennials, culminating with its own apotheosis at the 1977 edition of the São Paulo Bienal.

Broader histories of the developments of the 1960s and 70s in Latin America situate CAYC among the local responses to an international spirit of revolt embodied by the Paris student protests of May 1968 or the Civil Rights Movement and antiwar protests in the United States. To the extent the CAYC is present in global art history, it serves as an example of conceptualist practices that emerged in parts of the world that, in spite of their efforts, were generally unknown to or unacknowledged by the New York art world. These narratives do not account for the ways in which CAYC's "spirit of revolt" came up against Glusberg's desire for institutional recognition, for instance, or for the many figures of the New York (and global) art world that not only acknowledged CAYC, but actively contributed to its activities. To consider CAYC's place in Argentine, Latin American, and global art histories is thus to consider complex systems of global linkages within a dialectic of cultural hegemony and decentered or local exigencies. My critical methods are aimed at demonstrating CAYC's crucial participation in the *construction*, rather than application, of a global reorientation of art practices.

SYSTEMS

In an early text titled “What is the CAYC?,” Glusberg emphasizes its collective approach to “the new unity of our art, science, and social environment.”⁹ This unified vision for interdisciplinary art production also speaks to his interest in the period’s prevailing theories of communication, structural and semiotic modes of analysis, and phenomenology of perception. It informed what he would later call “systems art,” a term referring to both methodologies of production (art as process) and a new understanding of the work of art (art among processes). While artists did turn to systematic or mechanical means of art-making in an effort to undermine or eliminate the traces of their authorship, as in *Arte y Cibernética*, the term applied also to the completed work. “Systems” was a way of conceiving the operative potential of a work of art, not merely as an object whose meaning is determined by a viewer, but whose meaning is *completed* by a viewer as she enters the system. Chronicling the use of the term at CAYC, Natalia Pineau writes that systems were works “unhinged from figuration and where ‘information’ had been converted into material; that had modified the traditional concept of art to require the ‘participation of an active spectator’ as a fundamental element of the constitution of the work; that replaced the finished and feasibly-sold object, available for contemplation, with a generative art of ‘experiences’ through which the artist becomes an ‘investigator’ and the photographer a great ‘assistant’ that registered them.”¹⁰

In a public, outdoor exhibition held in 1972, Victor Grippo, working with artist Jorge Gamarra and rural worker A. Rossi, conceived of a work titled *Construcción de un horno popular para hacer pan* (*Construction of a Traditional Rural Oven for Making Bread*), which involved building a mud-brick oven in the center of Buenos Aires’ Plaza

⁹ Glusberg, “Qué es el CAYC = What is the CAYC.” Translation mine.

¹⁰ Pineau, “El CAYC: La Reconstrucción de un Programa Institucional,” 26. Translation mine.

Roberto Arlt, baking bread in the traditional rural style, and handing it out to passersby (figs. 2-3). The handmade oven, which retained an anti-systematic quality of manufacture, was the basis for the establishment of an environment of radical making, giving, and ritual. It proposed a collaborative act of creation that undermined the privileged status of the artist/genius while producing a utilitarian object (food) and a context for collective ritual (eating). The recontextualization of a rural oven in an urban center pointed to the dislocation of people amid massive waves of migration to urban centers and the disappearance of rural traditions. Importantly, the oven was not an object in itself, but part of a “system” in which the “participation of an active spectator” – in this case the distracted viewers walking through Plaza Roberto Arlt – is a constitutive element of the completed work.

In this sense, the term engages with Jack Burnham’s contention that “art does not reside in material entities, but in relations between people and the components of their environment.”¹¹ If art relies on the shifting environments of its display, “system” might also refer to an unstable semiotic field of interpretation that fluctuates across different historical and institutional contexts. “Where the object almost always has a fixed shape and boundaries,” Burnham writes, “the consistency of a system may be altered in time and space, its behavior determined both by external conditions and its mechanisms of control.”¹² Following Roland Barthes’ influential declaration of the death of the author five years prior, the notion of art as a system acknowledges the dependency of its meaning on context. To better grasp this instability of meaning, I turn to Jacques Derrida’s claim that “every sign...can be cited, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely

¹¹ Burnham, “Systems Aesthetics,” 31.

¹² *Ibid.*, 32.

nonsaturable fashion.”¹³ In his critique of performative communication, which J. L. Austin theorized as “the communication of an intentional meaning,” Derrida dismantles the implication of totality or unity in any meaning – the possibility that no “remainder” escapes it.¹⁴ His deconstructive critique of this logocentrism, or language’s marking of the presence of the real in the world, undermines anyone’s authority of interpretation. I will argue that, in conditions of military dictatorship, this negation of the determinacy of language is a deeply political gesture. It opens up a social space in which conceptual art can function outside of the traditional analogic communication of “intentional meaning” in art. Conceptualism as I will discuss it here – primarily in the form of found objects and proposals for unrealized works – deliberately denotes nothing; “reduced to a system of significations,”¹⁵ it only connotes. The decentralization of interpretive power embedded in Derrida’s critique is a useful theoretical tool for thinking about systems. Systems leak “remainders” and exceed or evade denotation. If the defining characteristic of CAYC was interdisciplinarity, systems were a unifying method for thinking about issues across architecture, linguistics, philosophy, psychology, and art. Systems were not an applied curatorial aesthetic but a conceptual stance or strategy rooted in structural and semiotic critique.

If the works of art are systems, if the exhibitions are systems, then CAYC is, of course, also a system, operating within still larger systems – “matrixes of human activity,” per Burnham.¹⁶ Thinking about CAYC as a system helps to complicate the central premises of narratives of conceptual art, which, as Mari Carmen Ramírez has written, rely on the “extremely reductive and self-serving art-historical framework that,

¹³ Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” 320.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 322.

¹⁵ Barthes, “The Photographic Message,” 18.

¹⁶ Burnham, “Systems Aesthetics,” 31.

despite a decade of critical reevaluation, continues to privilege a small, iconoclastic group of North American and British artists” to whom Latin American conceptual artists putatively responded.¹⁷ As I will argue, CAYC, as a system, has always been subject to (re)interpretation and myth-making (most of all by Glusberg himself). Its meanings are contested and contradictory. The instability of its definition supports another goal I share with Ramírez: “stepping beyond the (synchronic) naïve claims for truth of historicist accounts in order to (diachronically) apprehend the nature of Latin American contributions to the overall achievements of global Conceptualism.”¹⁸ Drawing on systems as a method thus entails moving away from the totalizing and hierarchical teleologies of art history and toward a diachronic or rhizomatic multiplicity of histories. Allowing for alternate historiographic models can demonstrate how art and artists resist and exceed the processes of flattening involved in constructing historical narratives, and might open up space for a reevaluation of categories. By treating CAYC as a system, I hope to draw larger historiographical conclusions about the canon itself as a contested and contradictory system.

CANONS

Though I began with Glusberg’s origin story for CAYC, his reading is but one among many that act on the historical and historiographical systems in play. Mariana Marchesi connects CAYC’s origins to the Foundation of Interdisciplinary Investigation, a space where dissident professors from the Architecture and Science departments of the University of Buenos Aires met during the military occupation of the school in June

¹⁷ Ramírez, “Tactics for Thriving on Adversity,” 426.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

1966.¹⁹ Later, Glusberg tied its institutional history to the closure of the famous Di Tella Institute and the radical project *Tucumán Arde* – I explore the implications of these links in chapter one. But a step back from local genealogies reveals the extent to which CAYC’s practices intersected with larger aesthetic-philosophical questions of international conceptualism: what Benjamin Buchloh has identified as “the *elimination of visuality* and the *mapping of the linguistic model onto the perceptual model*.”²⁰ Indeed, many contemporary avant-gardes had adopted similar strategies; the British Independent Group, as early as 1952, formed in an informal cultural studies seminar offered by the Institute for Contemporary Art, London. Like CAYC, the Independent Group’s approach emphasized integration of mass media, popular culture, technology and the arts. Another possible source is Robert Rauschenberg’s organization Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.), founded in 1967 to connect artists with engineers. But, Camnitzer argues, while emergent artists of the “center” – or the Western countries with which the development of conceptual art is usually associated – explored these questions in broad and abstract terms, the political conditions in Latin America forced the theoretical inquires of conceptual art to their logical conclusions, demanding direct action as an ethical, not aesthetic-philosophical, solution.²¹

Beginning with a 1962 coup d’etat, Argentina’s military dispensed with democratic elections, stepping in to expunge the nation of communist sympathies; a series of juntas and a short-lived but equally violent return to democracy defined politics and daily life until 1983. As I discuss in chapter one, the repressive politics of the 1960s and totalitarian dictatorships of the 1970s played an important role in the

¹⁹ Fundación OSDE, *Arte de sistemas*, 56.

²⁰ Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962-1969,” 106.

²¹ Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art*, 248.

dematerialization of art, and conceptual modes offered not only intangible or deceptive forms of critique but also opportunities for art to function as protest or resistance. Camnitzer's critique of CAYC focuses on its engagement with formal trends, arguing that "at least initially, CAYC overlooked the importance of the politically-oriented conceptualism that was taking place under its nose (as exemplified by *Tucumán Arde*)."²² This line of criticism, however, depends on a binary that poses the "pure" or "analytical" modes of North American and European Conceptualism against the "political" or "ideological" modes required by the exigencies of Latin American life. Camnitzer conflates "formal" with "international," and "local" with "political" in a way that limits CAYC's range of engagements with either the ethical *or* the aesthetic. The binary also reproduces a center/periphery model that has overdetermined the ways in which a group such as CAYC can be absorbed into histories of conceptualism as well as English-speaking scholarship on Latin America.²³ It posits flows of information and innovation outward (or down) from the center (or top), without allowing for a reversal in which provincial artists can supply anything but a reaction.

This kind of historiographical framework is reductive and, despite the recuperative work of scholars such as Mari Carmen Ramírez, continues to privilege the North American and British artists associated with the innovations of Conceptualism (as a teleological outcome of Minimalism). Though Glusberg's engagement with international conceptualism does respond to North American and European intellectual

²² Ibid. Camnitzer's analysis follows Marta Traba, who denounced Conceptual practices as imported fads that represented a "surrender" of Latin American art traditions to North American cultural imperialism.

²³ As an example, Peter Osborne writes in his survey of Conceptual Art, "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." These "ideational concerns," as I hope to demonstrate, were of primary interest to the artists of CAYC. Osborne, *Conceptual Art*, 37.

movements, Ramírez complicates this narrative with two important points: first, that the diverse practices we now label as “Conceptualism” were part of “a phenomenon that took place in a ‘federation of provinces,’ with the ‘traditional hegemonic center [being] one among many’”; and second, that the exchanges and negotiations of CAYC and other Latin American artists were “guided by the internal dynamics and contradictions of the local context.”²⁴ I argue that, rather than overlooking “the politically oriented conceptualism that was taking place under its nose,” CAYC concerned itself with both modes at shifting and overlapping moments, making overtly political statements at times and shifting toward abstract ideas when it was politically expedient to do so. Reading the fluctuating “contradictions of the local context,” in which free speech protections changed with each regime, allowed CAYC to operate at varying frequencies of critique.

Furthermore, I hope to complicate the degree to which formal or “analytical” conceptualism is read as apolitical. Even iconic works that are commonly cited in this vein, such as Joseph Kosuth’s *One and Three Chairs* (1965), labor to expose the structures of meaning at work in the interpretation of language and image. This exposure is indeed a deeply political act that undermines any singular or authoritative meaning, and thus denies the logocentric logic of structures of authority. Even CAYC’s seemingly apolitical work, as I will discuss later, engaged insistently with semiotic questions. That these questions were, in fact, inherently political is an argument I will lay out in chapter two.

Homing in on one CAYC exhibition, *Signos en Ecosistemas Artificiales* at the 1977 São Paulo Bienal, I will consider how an exhibition functions as a system of signs, open to historically contingent interpretations. Featuring fifteen works by the Grupo CAYC, the exhibition investigated semiotic distinctions between the natural and artificial

²⁴ Ramírez, “Tactics for Thriving on Adversity,” 426.

world. Works such as *Factor interespecífico* by Jorge González Mir, in which paper blackbirds peered out from inside real hanging birdcages, or *Proyecto Huevos* by Luis Fernando Benedit, in which a real stuffed hen sits next to a box of wooden eggs, explored the limits of semiosis in the vein of Kosuth. Victor Grippo's *Energia*, which documented the invisible energy stored inside a potato, used metaphor to draw connections to human consciousness. Connoting an abstract (and politically charged) idea through harmless and familiar objects, these works require an imaginative leap by the viewer to produce meaning. The exposure of the operative structures of signification and the dispersal of interpretive authority that thematized this exhibition carried an implicit critique at the height of both Argentina and Brazil's repressive political regimes. Nonetheless, the works of Benedit, Grippo, and the rest of Grupo CAYC had accrued other discursive meanings in the system of the biennial, such that the very regime they seemed to critique awarded them the grand prize. Through analysis of both the works of art and the discursive currents in which they circulated, I hope to map a more nuanced critical topology surrounding CAYC. Attention to the specificities of CAYC's engagements with local and international art circuits will help locate its achievements and its continuing importance.

As a final point of departure from Camnitzer's critique, I point to Glusberg's active role in establishing continuity between CAYC and politicized works by predecessors such as the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella and the Grupo de Artistas de Vanguardia responsible for *Tucumán Arde*. Exhibitions such as *Anteproyectos* (1973) sketched a genealogy of "antecedents" from the radicalized practices of the 1960s to the Group of Thirteen at CAYC.²⁵ Though overlaps did exist, the Argentine scholar Fernando

²⁵ Davis, "Dispositivos Tácticos." An exhibition catalog for *Anteproyectos* listed "the antecedents of ideological conceptualism developed by the Group of Thirteen," proposing a history that began with the

Davis demonstrates how even artists affiliated with CAYC resisted this impulse to situate CAYC within a lineage of recognizable institutional antecedents and “set the artistic clock of Buenos Aires to international time,” primarily because of the ways in which such affiliations limited and deactivated radical commitments that exceeded the sphere of art.²⁶ An exhibition titled “*Anteproyectos*” (“*Blueprints*”) performs a tradition in which CAYC is the culmination of early stabs, or plans, laid out by its antecedents. The discursive transformation of CAYC’s exhibition at the São Paulo Bienal, however, complicates this tradition and demonstrates the depoliticizing effects of mapping the local onto the international. Like CAYC, the São Paulo Bienal is an institution that aims to insert local practices into international networks of visibility, and in so doing risks flattening the political specificity of diverse practices in order to fit into categories like “Latin American” and “Conceptualism.” Alternative models for attending to these specificities, however, reveal the insufficiency of such labels and allow for a more complex landscape of exchange.

Experiencias Visuales series at Di Tella, ran through *Tucumán Arde* and the vanguards of the 1960s, and concluded with the Grupo de los Trece.

²⁶ Ibid.

CAYC and the Problem of Latin America: Contested Histories of Conceptualism

ANTECEDENTS AND GENEALOGIES OF CONCEPTUALISM

Jorge Glusberg's conception of art as a system was not a new development in Buenos Aires, but part of a decades-long and diverse local movement toward "dematerialized" practices.²⁷ During the decade of the 1960s, an avant-garde emerged around the Centro de Artes Visuales at the Instituto Torcuato di Tella, a private foundation established by the family of an automobile and appliance magnate in 1958. Conceived as an engine of modernization of the Argentine art scene during the period of aperture that followed the deposal of Perón (known as the "Revolución Libertadora"), Di Tella funded annual prizes and exhibitions of local and international artists and opened a studio and gallery space near the University of Buenos Aires downtown.

Under the directorship of critic Jorge Romero Brest, Di Tella championed pop experimentation throughout the 1960s, and became famous for hosting Happenings and *ambiciones* (environments) that culminated each year in the *Experiencias Visuales* exhibition series.²⁸ As these pivotal works transformed the gallery space into a site of critical and participatory experience, the activities of Di Tella were covered breathlessly in the press. For conservative cultural critics and their publics, Di Tella's incipient modernity betrayed the genteel traditionalism of Argentina's art history, and moreover

²⁷ For a panorama of emergent local practices in this vein, see Alonso et al., *Sistemas, Acciones y Procesos: 1965-1975*.

²⁸ The *Experiencias Visuales* series featured the work of artists shortlisted for the Premio Nacional, which was awarded annually. Marta Minujín's installation *La Menesunda*, for the 1965 *Experiencias* show, exemplifies the radical spirit of the Di Tella vanguard. For more depth on the Instituto Di Tella the avant garde's break with institutions, see Katzenstein, *Listen, Here, Now!* and Longoni and Mestman, *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde."*

represented the decay of moral standards; the term “happening” came to mean “anything out of the ordinary, suspicious, and slightly scandalous.”²⁹ Toward the end of the decade, these associations made Di Tella, among other institutions, a target of the reactionary government of General Juan Carlos Onganía (installed by military coup in 1966), who dismantled institutions of culture and education through the intervention and forced occupation of the University of Buenos Aires and the systematic repression of students and professors.

As the artists of Di Tella responded to both local and international political mobilization in the late 1960s by shifting their focus from object to action, from individual to collective creation, they often appropriated strategies of radical activism in collaboration with opposition movements. The vanguard spirit of Di Tella had equipped many artists to question their relationship to institutions like the media and even Di Tella itself. Pop’s appropriative critique of mass media and advertising, as Di Tella artists shifted in focus from object-based works to sensorial environments, both provided the vocabulary for this radical break and anticipated CAYC’s semiotic critique of modes of communication and the built environment. An early example of this shift was Eduardo Costa, Raúl Escari, and Roberto Jacoby’s 1966 work *Happening que no existió* (*Happening That Did Not Exist*) or *Happening para un jabalí difunto* (*Happening for a Dead Boar*), in which reports of a Happening that never actually happened circulated widely in newspapers and magazines. The artists provided “documentation” of young people participating in ambiguous scenes of excitement, exploiting the robust presence of art criticism in Argentina’s mainstream media and its fascination with the activities of the avant-garde. The project, which played out exclusively in the news media,

²⁹ King, *El Di Tella y el Desarrollo Cultural Argentino En La Década Del Sesenta*, 138.

inaugurated a new genre that Jacoby called *arte de los medios de comunicación* (media art) in a later manifesto.³⁰

Oscar Bony's *La familia obrera*, shown at Di Tella's *Experiencias '68*, also epitomized many of these shifts toward action, collaboration, and appropriation of political tactics. In the installation, Bony hired a working-class family to sit on display for eight hours each day, while the ambient sounds of their home life filled the gallery space. Bony paid the breadwinner of the family, Luis Ricardo Rodríguez, twice his hourly wages for staging the "tableau-vivant," drawing attention to the grim economic policies that exploited and undervalued his labor as a die-caster.³¹ But it was Roberto Plate's contribution to *Experiencias 68* that provoked an official response. His *Baño (Bathroom)*, a replica toilet stall, encouraged visitors to enter and scrawl messages on its walls. When the graffiti turned out to be overwhelmingly directed against the government, police intervened; in an odd performance of censorship, officers stood guard in front of the toilet stall. In solidarity, the other artists participating in *Experiencias 68* destroyed their works on the street in front of the gallery, closing the exhibition.

As political conditions worsened under Onganía, the closure of *Experiencias 68* prefigured increased state surveillance, the shuttering of Di Tella itself in 1970, and the politicized avant-garde's break with institutions. Drawing on the tactics of international protest movements as well as local events, such as a 1969 popular revolt called the *Cordobazo*, artists such as Juan Pablo Renzi and Roberto Jacoby turned toward disruptive and collective subversive action. This collective impulse culminated in *Tucumán Arde*, a travelling installation of sound, film, and slide projections made in collaboration with

³⁰ Jacoby's manifesto is reproduced in Katzenstein, *Listen, Here, Now!*, 223.

³¹ The worker was a contested symbol in this period, particularly after the removal of Juan Domingo Perón from the presidency in 1955. Perón had championed the working classes and cultivated strong ties with unions. The "de-Perónization" policies adopted by the "Revolución Libertadora" involved weakening and discrediting labor organizations.

workers from the poorest province in Argentina. The project, which is often read as art, might better represent an avant-garde that turned away from art altogether, conceptualizing a more radical political practice “executed at the margins of the art world.” As Ines Katzenstein writes, in *Tucumán Arde*

the limits of the encounter between the artistic avant-garde and the ‘political’ avant-garde are discernible...Instead of understanding *Tucumán Arde* as the extreme experience that led to this categorical definition, we prefer to read it as a final, lucid attempt at crystallizing the artistic avant-garde and the ‘political’ avant-garde as terms not subordinate to one another; rather this proved to be a time when politics imposed itself as an exclusive mandate leading to the abandonment of all other specific practices in favor of direct action.³²

This methodology of direct action set an important example of the appropriative use of existing channels of communication to reach a broad public. The overwhelming textual, photographic, and audiovisual information in *Tucumán Arde* created a sensory environment that echoed the Happenings at Di Tella and Jacoby’s interest in mass media reportage. As Daniel Quiles has noted, organizers “described the environment as a *circuito sobreinformativa*, using the same term [critic Oscar] Masotta used a year earlier to describe the media’s obsession with Happenings. In this case, *sobreinformación* was framed positively: the overload of information was to reiterate the message to the point of incontrovertibility.”³³ Bombardment with a message was, indeed, the military’s strategy for establishing propaganda as fact through ownership of all communications circuits. Interestingly, publicity for the event billed it as a “biennial of avant-garde art” to provide some political cover. It did not work. Again the police intervened, closing *Tucumán Arde* in Rosario and Buenos Aires as well as the syndical buildings it occupied.

³² Katzenstein, *Listen, Here, Now!*, 169.

³³ Quiles, “Dead Boars, Viruses, and Zombies.”

Of course, a singular narrative of the collective spirit of artists involved with the Di Tella avant-garde and the activism of *Tucumán Arde* papers over the diverse approaches of the decade, and narrows their geographic scope to the cities of Rosario and Buenos Aires. Its focus on local political conditions ignores the ways in which these practices reconciled with broader interests in dematerialization, institutional critique, and structural investigation of the power relationships embedded in language and medium. On the other hand, the extent to which these practices have been read in alignment with international conceptual art, as Fernando Davis argues, has evacuated their dissident potential by reducing them to a subcategory of the larger, normative category of conceptual art. In a critical reading of Benjamin Buchloh's essay "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," Davis shows how these practices become normalized as "Latin American" – a category defined by ideological content – within larger narratives of Conceptualism.³⁴ Resorting instead to Alexander Alberro's definition of Conceptualism as "a field of multiple and conflicting practices rather than a discourse or unified artistic theory," Davis argues that the disruptive power of these practices cannot be explained only from a logic of art:

In its radical commitment to redefine ways of understanding art and its relationship to society, Conceptualism constitutes a strategy to overcome the modern split between art and life, the impact of which, far from confined to the margins of the past, extends its disruptive effects to the present. Thinking critically about these practices is to ask, also, for their disruptive potential beyond their time, their ability to interpellate (uncomfortably) today.³⁵

Juan Pablo Renzi, an artist from Rosario who was centrally involved with the production of *Tucumán Arde* and later waded into the activities of CAYC, resisted the assimilation of his practice into an international conceptual mode. He accused, according to Luis

³⁴ Davis, "El Conceptualismo Como Categoría Táctica."

³⁵ Davis, "Dispositivos Tácticos." Translation mine.

Camnitzer, Jorge Glusberg and Lucy Lippard of wrongly linking him and the Rosario group to that movement saying, “Bourgeois culture always tended to remove content from any art creation, and this conceptual art of today is no more than a content-less (and senseless) messages.”³⁶ Renzi’s resistance to conceptualism as an art movement is rooted in his view of conceptualism as a strategy for living, an overcoming of “the modern split between art and life.” For Renzi, conceptual art references ideas, rather than implementing them, and as art cannot avoid absorption into bourgeois culture as commodified objects or placeholders of symbolic value. Surely some artists associated with CAYC shared this concern, though it is difficult to know how each reconciled his politics with Glusberg’s overarching frames and the motivations of the rest of the members of the group. As we will see, however, CAYC does attempt, time and again, “to overcome the modern split between art and life.” And reading these attempts as conceptual art demonstrates how, beyond simply referencing ideas or implementing them, CAYC artists could enact the process by which art is de-politicized (and re-politicized), exposing the very conditions of its containment. *This* is the “disruptive potential beyond their time, their ability to interpellate (uncomfortably) today.”

After *Tucumán Arde*, most artists involved with the project abandoned art for a period, some permanently. The genealogies that tie CAYC to Di Tella and *Tucumán Arde* typically ignore this rupture in order to establish narrative continuity among the radicalized practices of the 1960s and the experimental practices of the 1970s. Glusberg himself, as I have mentioned, participated in this condensation around a category of “ideological conceptualism” by curating exhibitions that began with “antecedent” works of the 1960s. For him, these genealogies validated the place CAYC occupied in a historiographical terrain – the void left by the interrupted project of Di Tella – that

³⁶ Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art*, 71.

integrated the narrative of Argentine conceptualism. If Renzi's resistance to such a process exposes "the complex web of tensions and discontinuities, accelerations and returns, contradictions and breaks these practices fueled and mobilized over the period (and beyond) in the struggle for meaning," it also reveals how the containment of a narrative can deactivate or silence the critical density of such diverse practices.³⁷ Though Davis remains focused on Glusberg's role in constructing neat lines of continuity between CAYC and its "predecessors," the work of CAYC begs many of the same questions about commitments that exceeded the sphere of art, about the role of Latin American practices within these larger stories, and about the meaning of the label "Latin American" itself. Destabilizing such a narrative can open up the possibility that political conditions animated resistance in many forms, some of which expressly resisted the constraints of organization.

Glusberg's ability to mythologize CAYC and its place in Argentine art was a skill he also applied to himself. Born in Buenos Aires in 1932, he was originally an entrepreneur and modeled himself as a self-made man, often quipping, "Yo soy un ruso de Caballito que me hice a mí mismo" ("I am a Russian from [the neighborhood] Caballito and I made myself").³⁸ Founding the lighting manufacturing company Modulor led him to an interest in architecture and design, and by the late 1960s he had established himself as a critic. He had also made the fortune that would allow him to operate and promote CAYC at his own expense. This management style, in which he mixed patronage with gallery representation, combined with a forceful personality to generate a degree of notoriety that continues to precede him. His complete control over CAYC may

³⁷ Davis, "Dispositivos Tácticos."

³⁸ Lebenglik, "Recordando a Jorge Glusberg."

have been a source of tension among his artists, in spite of their commitment to collective enterprise. Indeed, shortly before his death, Glusberg resigned from his post as Director of the National Museum of Fine Arts amid an investigation into “authoritarian” management practices and misuse of funds. But the essential characteristic of his personality was ceaseless self-promotion; it was this instinct that motivated his industrious production of *gacetillas*, his network of connections with international figures of the art world and public intellectuals, and the perception of CAYC’s significance as the nucleus of the Argentina’s avant-garde after Di Tella. This talent for hawkish promotion was undoubtedly a source of as much irritation among his circles, and his lack of delicacy created vocal detractors and enemies.

It is difficult to suss out Glusberg’s personal politics and motivations for fostering the critical spirit of CAYC, as he seemed far more pragmatic than ideological. His ability to navigate the always-shifting political terrain of this period required amicable relationships with the very perpetrators of the worst crimes of the 1970s, though these relationships ironically created the space from which CAYC artists could openly criticize them. It seems clear that Glusberg’s interest in political questions were primarily motivated by the extent to which they were useful in marketing CAYC to Latin American and foreign art networks. His tactical shifts between framing CAYC’s fluency in an international language and CAYC as proponents of a Latin American identity politics, I believe, represent calculations about how to maintain CAYC’s currency. Though Glusberg’s complicated personality is difficult to reconcile and his motivations are slippery, his relentless ambition was successful in achieving a kind of intractable place for himself and for CAYC within the very narratives he helped construct.

COLLECTIVE INQUIRY AND THE AESTHETICS OF INTERDISCIPLINARITY

In October 1970, CAYC opened a gallery space and gathering place: a three-story building at 452 Viamonte Street in downtown Buenos Aires (fig. 4). Designed by the prominent firm Manteola Sánchez Gomez, Santos, Solsona and Viñoly Architects, the building's exterior was a bold matrix of radiating lines that paralleled walls, floor and the street. Its address was significant: just blocks away from Di Tella, CAYC situated itself within the neighborhood of galleries, bookstores, bars, and University of Buenos Aires buildings that had become known as the "manzana loca" ("crazy block"). As art spilled out of the galleries and into the streets, the area developed a cultural identity that came to characterize the institutions, fashions, politics, and people that occupied it. Beatriz Sarlo, who entered the University of Buenos Aires around 1960, has described how "a student might walk over to the university publishing houses (EUDEBA) on the corner of Florida and Viamonte or cross the street to Galatea bookstore, which carried all the latest French books and magazines, before continuing down Florida to the Di Tella" or nearby Galería Bonino.³⁹ Surely CAYC's location sought not only to capitalize on the social geography of the neighborhood, but also to connect itself physically with the nearby institutions and intelligentsia that contributed to its caché.

If the CAYC building associated itself with the legacy of Di Tella by proximity, its design, in some ways, extended the logic of the *ambitaciones*. Rather than a traditional white cube or laboratory for solemn contemplation, the space was immersive and participatory, itself resembling the sensory environments meant to engage viewers on new levels. From its graphic, modular exterior, repeating frames radiated inward through the entrance and into a vestibule or lobby, creating an illusory depth that disallowed a

³⁹ Podalsky, *Specular City*, 141. See the chapter "Architecture on the Up and Out" for a discussion of the role of this architectural firm in reformulations of social space amid the ascendant consumerism emphasized by post-Peronist governments.

passerby's cursory glance across works for sale through a gallery window. The absence of windows altogether suggests a lack of interest in the conventional architectural conceits of a gallery concerned with optimizing the conditions of commercial display. Very little natural light seems to pass through the building, and installation images from exhibitions indicate that interior walls were painted dark (see figs. 5-6). A spiral staircase connected the ground floor with two basement levels of gallery space. Entering CAYC simulated penetrating or descending into an abyss, where art objects held the same primacy of place as ideas.

Information on upcoming events and exhibitions occupied a rectangular exterior niche, which, along with the octagonal entrance to its left, interrupted the parallel corrugations of the metal façade. In an early photograph (fig. 4), an image of a television monitor hangs over the schedule, echoing the architecture's preoccupation with new technologies and theories of communication. The text below announces the basic premise of the space: interdisciplinarity. In this regard, Glusberg differentiated CAYC from Di Tella, criticizing it in August of that year as an officializing space where artists worked in isolation, declaring, "we are not going to meet with only artists and nobody else, we are going to intermix disciplines and end the compartmentalized stances of culture."⁴⁰ Some early engagements at the new site included a symposium on poetic investigations and their relation to visual communication; a lecture on "Antiliterature and Writing" by Alfred MacAdam, then of Yale University; and a seminar titled "Toward a Sociology of Objects," given by Abraham Moles, then of the University of Strasbourg, on the effects of computers and information theory on aesthetics.⁴¹ Beyond its address, CAYC's spatial and architectural emphasis on fields that would intersect with art also reflected a political

⁴⁰ Fundación OSDE, *Arte de sistemas*, 57.

⁴¹ See GT-50, GT-62, and GT-144.

objective: ending the compartmentalization of knowledge and the disciplinary barriers between the social sciences.

The programming of the Escuela de Altos Estudios (School of Advanced Studies), which offered free seminars taught by local and visiting intellectuals at CAYC, focused largely on extended analysis of the ways space and messages are mediated through architecture, urban planning, and new media. “Who better,” writes Mariana Marchesi, “than architects (designers of spaces for living), scientists (scholars of the laws of life), and artists (creators of images) to join and configure a new art from a continent that still hoped to occupy a place in the world?”⁴² A *gacetilla* introducing the Escuela de Altos Estudios, in English, stresses the way disciplinary divisions between “reflexive men (scientists, philosophers, theoreticians)” and “men of action” (artists, technicians, planners, operators) limit the pragmatic application of “knowledge of the realities in which we are submerged and of which we are part.” Glusberg proposes bringing these fields together as an act of resistance against “supervised and constantly controlled knowledge” – interdisciplinarity as a methodology of liberation for Latin America. Seminars offered by the Escuela de Altos Estudios covered topics ranging from semiotic analyses of art and language to poetry and criticism to sociological and political theory, architecture, and a sort of Latin American futurism called “prospective.”⁴³ The CAYC building thus functioned as a space of exchange, a nucleus for a local intellectual community that mirrored the larger, international community to which Glusberg imagined himself a delegate.

⁴² Fundación OSDE, *Arte de sistemas*, 13.

⁴³ While a full treatment of the EAE is outside the scope of this paper, its activities do comprise a large proportion of the *gacetillas* at the Benson. A future project might situate the EAE within a history of Argentine avant-garde writers and artists that have formed intellectual communities around publications such as *Martín Fierro*, *Proa*, and *Sur*. These communities played an important role in bringing European thinkers to Buenos Aires in the early part of the twentieth century. The *Martinfierristas*, for example, arranged Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s much-fêted visit to Buenos Aires in 1926.

In November, CAYC opened 2.972.453, an exhibition curated by Lucy Lippard for the new space. The exhibition was the third of four numbered shows Lippard organized in Seattle, Vancouver, Buenos Aires, and Valencia, California, and, as she has reiterated in personal accounts, was part of a deeply consequential stage of her political development. Having traveled to Buenos Aires in the fall of 1968 to serve as a juror for the exhibition *Materiales*,⁴⁴ Lippard stayed on in Argentina as guest of Glusberg, meeting with members of the Rosario Group as they laid the groundwork for *Tucumán Arde*. Chronicling Lippard's time in Argentina, which coincided precisely with the rupture between avant-garde artists and cultural institutions, Pip Day writes, "Looking at the effects of the oppressive political situation on radical Argentine cultural production, [she] could have seen the ways in which exhibitions themselves were being unambiguously instrumentalized as political tools and events, as strategically constructed detonators or calls to action and as forums for the re-thinking of political potentialities within the cultural context."⁴⁵ These practices put into sharp relief for Lippard the relative disengagement of the New York art world as well as her dissatisfaction with her own politics, "especially in relation to her late turn to feminism."⁴⁶ In an interview in 1969, she described the impact of her trip:

I was politicized by a trip to Argentina in the fall of 1968, when I talked to artists who felt it would be immoral to make their art in the society that existed there. It becomes clear that today everything, even art, exists in a political situation. I don't mean that art itself has to be seen in political terms or look political, but the way artists handle their art, where they make it, the chances they get to make it, how they are going to let it out, and to whom – it's all part of a lifestyle and a political situation. It becomes a matter of artists' power, or artists achieving enough

⁴⁴ The Unión Industrial Argentina sponsored the exhibition *Materiales: nuevas técnicas, nuevas expresiones* to promote the new aesthetics and materials of industrial design. Artist prizes were named after the companies that supplied materials: Duperial, Alba, Cámara de Industria Plástica, Vidriería Vasa, Sociedad Mixta Siderúrgica Argentina, and Fabricaciones Militares.

⁴⁵ Day, "Locating '2,972,453': Lucy R. Lippard in Argentina," 85.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

solidarity so they aren't at the mercy of a society that doesn't understand what they are doing...⁴⁷

The recognition of art as operating within systems certainly paralleled the philosophy of CAYC. In the context of the new CAYC building, the works chosen for 2.972.453 also echoed the architectural treatment of art as ideas. The exhibition included thirteen works by Eleanor Antin, Siah Armajani, David Askevold, Stanley Brouwn, Victor Burgin, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Don Celender, James Collins, Christopher Cook, Gilbert & George, Ira Joel Haber, and Richards Jarden, for which she had invited the artists “to provide a set of project descriptions and instructions for the newly created CAYC institution” to carry out.⁴⁸ While Lippard’s previous numbered shows had involved executing some artists’ proposals to complete the works *in situ*, none of the artists in 2.972.453 were present for the exhibition, and very few of their submissions resulted in physical manifestations of the proposals. In the dark new gallery spaces of CAYC, the installation primarily took the form of paper affixed to the wall, sometimes accompanied by photographs or supplementary objects (see fig. 5). The catalogue, like those for her other numbered shows, was made up of index cards to be arranged in no particular order, listing the artists’ names as if they were dictionary entries. The exhibition, Day writes, “was far more radical than the two previous number shows, in the sense that the exhibition itself apparently dematerialized.”⁴⁹ This term, which has become so linked to Lippard’s 1968 essay with John Chandler and her practices as a curator, mirrored Glusberg’s use of “systems” to theorize the shift from the object toward experimental, process-based works. Lippard’s use of “dematerialization” contained both the release of the idea from the object and the release of the artist from social, political, economic, and technical

⁴⁷ Ibid., 90.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 93.

⁴⁹ Day, “Locating ‘2,972,453’,” 92.

limitations. It also proposed a new form of criticism rooted in following along with ideas rather than judging them to be good or bad. Dematerialization was thus available to everyone. And though artists such as Roberto Jacoby maintained that the concept was not a unique invention of Lippard's,⁵⁰ it would define nearly all CAYC exhibitions that followed it.

Lippard's exhibition signaled the outward focus of CAYC's exhibitions and programming, stressing its dual functions not only as an art gallery but also as an institution that sought to create circuits of local and international visibility for Argentine and Latin American artists. In their short catalogue essays, Lippard and Glusberg used the terms "conceptual art," "idea art," and "dematerialized art" interchangeably, assuming their adaptability to international discourses developing around conceptual art. In her text, Lippard gestures toward the political dimensions embedded in CAYC's interest in dematerialization:

Social change, radical politics, computer storage/retrieval methods, group therapeutic techniques, modern disposable living, lack of faith in existing cultural institutions and economic systems have all affected the emergence of dematerialized art. Because it is usually lighter physically and easily reproducible, its mobility and immediate geographic range is greater than that of painting and sculpture. Rapid dispersing makes international development and interrelationships clearer. (Some of the first work in this field I was aware of was made by the Rosario group in Argentina.)⁵¹

⁵⁰ Pip Day highlights Jacoby's condemnation of Lippard's ethical position and historical account of the development of the "dematerialization of the art object" and conceptual art as mapped out in her book *Six Years*. Lippard omits Argentine cultural producers, such as the critic Oscar Masotta, and their important role in her "'awakening' (as Lippard describes it) or 'epiphany' (in Jacoby's words)." As Daniel Quiles has pointed out, Masotta's 1967 lecture "Después del Pop: Nosotros desmaterializamos" ("After Pop, We Dematerialize") made use of the term to summarize media-art experiments between 1965 and 1967, the year before Lippard and John Chandler published "The Dematerialization of Art."

⁵¹ Unpaginated index card. Cited in Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art*, 249. The whole catalogue is reproduced in Cornelia Butler, et. al., *From Conceptualism to Feminism: Lucy Lippard's Numbers Shows 1969-74* (2012).

Here she draws a connection between the dispersal of information made easier through communication technologies and developments in dematerialized art as a transnational phenomenon of “interrelationships.” This speaks precisely to Glusberg’s tireless use of *gacetillas*. Through his distribution of *gacetillas* and active invitation of key figures of the international art world (such as Lippard), Glusberg formed a network – both tangible and virtual – that ran through Buenos Aires and beyond.

At the same time, criticism of his communications methods suggests that CAYC’s circuits of intellectual exchange may have been as imagined as they were real. In a *gacetilla* announcing Lippard’s exhibition, Glusberg engages with the critical discourse linked to new international shifts toward “arte conceptual,” concluding, “conceptual art is interested in the environment that surrounds us, in time, in processes, in the systems that are interrelated with the experiences of daily life.”⁵² What is interesting about his engagement, as Pineau points out, is his appropriation of the “conceptual” label to encompass “systems art,” again making interchangeable use of the terminology. This alignment with new trends in critical discourse has the effect of marketing CAYC as an avant-garde institution “founded on *synchronicity* – not *originality* – of purpose with respect to the international art scene.”⁵³ The inherent tension in Glusberg’s negotiation of international and local concerns emerges in the ways he both plugged into existing networks and managed to shift them south, opening up intellectual flows through Buenos Aires.

Also in July 1971, Glusberg’s comprehensive exhibition *Arte de Sistemas* opened at the Museum of Modern Art in Buenos Aires. Born during the heady years of artistic

⁵² Glusberg, Jorge. “CAyC: Arte conceptual; Una exhibición organizada por Lucy Lippard (EE.UU) y Jorge Glusberg.” Translation mine.

⁵³ Pineau, “El CAyC: La Reconstrucción de un Programa Institucional.”

activity and institutional rejuvenation under the Revolución Libertadora, Buenos Aires' Museum of Modern Art was the creation of the critic Rafael Squirru in 1956. The Museum, like its peer in São Paulo, was modeled in form and in name on the example of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and was seen as a necessary component in establishing Buenos Aires as one of the world's artistic centers. Andrea Giunta has traced the reorganization of cultural institutions during this period, as a product of a new political climate that favored internationalism and sought to "catch up" with global art currents. A museum of modern art was a symbol for a large city, she writes, and New York's "recent rise to artistic glory not only constituted a point of comparison for local cultural figures...but also certain critics, who saw in Buenos Aires a Latin American city that could repeat the process of cultural expansion that had made New York the center of the international artistic scene."⁵⁴ Squirru's sense of urgency in making Argentina's borderless modernism known to the international art world was such that he literally staged its first exhibition on a ship, touring a "floating exhibit of modern art" to ports in Africa, Asia, and the United States on the repurposed *Yapeyú*.

By 1971, Buenos Aires' Museum of Modern Art had taken up residence in the Centro Cultural San Martín. Also an operahouse, the site supported, as other important centers of modern art had, interaction between different forms of artistic expression. This approach dovetailed with the Di Tella's prestige in the 1960s, and later with CAYC, which in *Arte de Sistemas* used "systems" to address a range of new social, economic, technological, communication, and behavioral concerns. In his remarks at the opening on

⁵⁴ Giunta, *Avant-Garde, Internationalism, and Politics*, 67-68. See *Avant-Garde, Internationalism, and Politics* for a meticulous study of the relationships between cultural producers, institutions, and private patronage in this period of active internationalization. The process of cultural expansion came to an end, she argues, when under the Onganía dictatorship the avant-garde ultimately confronted the very institutions with which they had been involved in this project (like Di Tella), again reorienting avant-garde strategies relative to the political sphere.

July 19, the Museum's director Guillermo Whitelow praised CAYC for its "indefatigable work" in bringing together interdisciplinary fields through collective practices. The vast presentation of works, "from the conceptual to the cybernetic, does not appeal to a contemplator of the aesthetic sublime but to a lucid witness of the contemporary problems and investigations that have much to do with methodology."⁵⁵ Those methodologies, he stressed, were the true lesson of an exhibition that could bring together "a hundred investigators," including Vito Acconci, John Baldessari, Robert Barry, Christian Boltanski, Christo, Barry Flanagan, Gilbert & George, Hans Haacke, Allan Kaprow, Joseph Kosuth, Les Levine, Richard Long, Mario Merz, On Kawara, Dennis Oppenheim, Nam June Paik, and Richard Serra, along with the Argentines Luis Bedit, Carlos Ginzburg, Luis Pazos, Victor Grippo, Alberto Pellegrino and Alfredo Portillos, all of whom would form the Grupo de los Trece four months later.

Luis Bedit, whose work explored the impossibility of distinguishing, from a semiotic perspective, natural from artificial conditions, contributed *Laberinto Invisible*, part of a long typological interest in controlled environments. This installation demarcated a path for visitors to follow, surrounded by an arrangement of lights and mirrors that would trigger an alarm if the visitor strayed, by intercepting rays of light (fig. 7). In a social space that disciplined the body "by trial and error" – not unlike the alarm systems in today's museums – successful participants were rewarded at the end with the sight of an allegorical symbol, the Mexican oxolote or "walking fish," a salamander that originated in Lake Xochimilco under Mexico City and was believed to be related to the origins of human development.⁵⁶ Trained in architecture in Buenos Aires and Italy,

⁵⁵ Whitelow, Guillermo. Transcript of remarks delivered at the inauguration of *Arte de Sistemas*.

⁵⁶ Sarti, "Grupo CAyC." The oxolote, Sarti notes, could well be a reference to Julio Cortázar's famous story "Axolotl," published in his 1951 book of short stories, *Bestiario*. In the story, the contemplation of the strange animal "traps" the protagonist, who becomes the axolotl, subsumed into pure consciousness that he is incapable of communicating.

Benedit's analysis of cultural identity drew from his contact with Jannis Kounellis and *arte povera* as well as knowledge of landscaping, science, and anthropology. His labyrinths and habitats explored social behavior and human relationships to the environment. Glusberg, emphasizing the work as process and its dependence on the transformative participation of the viewer, describes *Laberinto Invisible* as a complete semiologic system. An instruction booklet "explaining how to carry out the Benedit experience of 'trial and error'" encompasses its denotative element, while "all the other elements constitute a global connotative system. When the participant makes the alarm go off electronically by forcing the labyrinth, the first level of meaning indicates that a mechanism has gone into operation. A second level of meaning connotes error. A third level of meaning may connote failure to obtain the reward of seeing the Mexican oxolote."⁵⁷ The different levels of meaning embedded in the labyrinth as system thus draw the participant's attention to the social and built environment that is always acting on the body as it learns to move through space.

Having achieved considerable success independently of CAYC, Benedit had already contributed *Biotrón*, a habitat for live bees that fed on artificial flowers, to the Venice Biennale in 1970. He exhibited *Laberinto Invisible* in solo shows in New York in 1972, as part of MoMA's new Projects series, and at London's Whitechapel Gallery in 1975.⁵⁸ A founding member of the Grupo de los Trece, Benedit remained with CAYC throughout, maintaining a consistent critical and aesthetic focus; his later contributions to CAYC's exhibition in São Paulo continued to explore the relationship between the natural and artificial within a semiotic system. His interest in social behavior within controlled environments would take on new metaphorical implications, as the city itself

⁵⁷ GT-181-A-I.

⁵⁸ See GT-181. Founded in May 1971, MoMA's Projects series was "a series of small exhibitions presented to inform the public about current researches and explorations in the visual arts."

became a kind of *ambitacion* in which political violence contained and defined both urban space and relationships between people who occupied it.

Luis Pazos, a former journalist and poet from La Plata who was also a founding member of the Grupo de los Trece, had collaborated the previous year with Jorge de Luján Gutierrez and Héctor Puppó under the name Grupo La Plata. He had also worked extensively with CAYC artist Edgardo Antonio Vigo on his experimental poetry magazine, *Diagonal Cero*, in the 1960s. As one of the most politically committed artists affiliated with CAYC, Pazos' performances, photographs, and textual works were defined by a spirit of action and play: "art-attitude," participation of the public, the union of art and life, and the erasure of limits between high and low culture were the tools with which he probed material and discursive forms of power. For *Arte de Sistemas*, Pazos published a performative work of fiction in conjunction with the exhibition, staging the kidnapping of Jorge Glusberg through a sequence of newspaper clippings imitating the daily papers of Buenos Aires (fig. 8). One reproduced a typewritten note from the alleged captors and their demands: "To the population: Until the art media seriously listens to our demands, Jorge Glusberg will remain kidnapped. [...] Grupo de Experiencias Estéticas, La Plata, 7-VII-71." The gesture, perhaps in reference to Jacoby's famous *Happening que no existió*, turned ironically on the guerilla tactics of the radical militant groups emerging in Argentina. The performativity of these tactics would become the subject of many of Pazos' later works.

Victor Grippo, also from La Plata, had trained as a chemist and become interested in visual communication through an industrial design course. Having experimented with painting geometric abstractions, Grippo now turned toward the many layers of metaphoric signification contained in objects. Exhibiting for the first time with CAYC, he contributed *Analogía I*, an early configuration of a work that would take many forms

throughout the 1970s (fig. 9). On each side of a wooden grid set into the wall, twenty potatoes occupied small niches, with a text in the center. Each potato was connected to a red and black wire, copper and zinc electrodes, which in turn connected to the other potatoes in the system. Also in the center panel was a small voltmeter, which registered the combined energy stored inside the forty total potatoes on the grid. The text, which included a dictionary definition for “papa” (“potato” or “father”) and “consciencia” (“conscience” or “consciousness”), drew connections to the food’s origins in the Americas as well as its invisible reservoir of energy as a metaphor for consciousness. Engaging with the formal vocabularies of *arte povera*⁵⁹ and assemblage, *Analogía I* subjects a humble, found object to more rigorous conditions of display; a natural object in an artificial environment.

In a *gacetilla* announcing the exhibition a month before it opened, Glusberg proclaimed that the titular “systems art includes the latest art tendencies of the second half of this century. Idea art, land art, arte povera, cybernetic art, arte de propuestas, and political art are grouped under the term systems art.”⁶⁰ Here, as Pineau has highlighted, “systems” represents an encompassing discursive category that both absorbs other international conceptual modes and synchronizes them with the interdisciplinary interests of CAYC. The exhibition later traveled as *Art Systems of Latin America* to Santiago, Chile; Paris, France; Ferrara, Italy; Pamplona, Spain and the United States, and established a model for external or outward-facing curatorial strategies that sought to introduce the work of CAYC (and Latin America) as a regional variant of international

⁵⁹ Germano Celant’s essay *Arte Povera: Notes for a Guerrilla War* makes many parallel calls for the elimination of barriers between art and life. Some scholars have attributed the revolutionary spirit of postwar Italian art and youth movements, arte povera among them, to the models of South American liberation struggles. First published in the November-December 1967 issue of *Flash Art*, the essay appropriates the manifesto styles of Latin American urban guerrilla movements. It is reproduced in Spanish in Alonso et al., *Sistemas, acciones y procesos, 1965-1975*.

⁶⁰ CAYC, “CAYC: *Arte de Sistemas en el Museo de Arte Moderno* (GT 54).”

developments. This approach emphasized the ways in which CAYC plugged regional concerns into an international circuit of art vocabularies and practices.

In November of that year, after the fabled visit by Grotowski, thirteen of the Argentine artists participating in *Arte de Sistemas* formed the Grupo de los Trece, the core of CAYC's visual arts wing and an experimental model for collective production (fig. 10). The founding members were Jacques Bedel, Luis Bénédict, Gregorio Dujovny, Carlos Ginzburg, Victor Grippo, Vicente Marotta, Jorge González Mir, Luis Pazos, Alberto Pellegrino, Alfredo Portillos, Juan Carlos Romero, Julio Teich, and Jorge Glusberg. The Grupo de los Trece met in a weekly workshop, worked individually and collaboratively, and exhibited together. Soon after it formed, the group invited the British psychiatrist David Cooper to undertake "an intense examination of its internal *problématique*." Cooper, who was born and trained in Cape Town, had developed a Marxist critique of psychiatry that he termed anti-psychiatry and found strong connections to the radical politics with which psychoanalysis had been identified through the departments of philosophy and literature at the University of Buenos Aires. Psycho-technical training, Cooper argued, was a method of social policing and constituted a pseudo-science that enforced the social norms required by capitalism. Psychiatry's interest in medicalizing defiance and persecuting the non-obedient was a means of cultural imperialism, and, as he wrote in a *gacetilla* advertising his lecture on "the politics of orgasm and the politics of impotence," the primary obligation of Latin American intellectuals should be to combat cultural imperialism in all its forms.⁶¹ Cooper's audit of the Grupo de los Trece examined not only "the anxieties of each one of its members and interpersonal motivations, but also the connections between art and the capitalistic

⁶¹ GT 208.

system, between cultural revolution and dominant political ideologies, between receivers of art works and a model for a new society” (see fig. 1).⁶² Glusberg later wrote, “If the influence of Grotowski had determined the formation of the Group, that of Cooper helped to consolidate it as such.” Though Cooper proposed anti-psychiatry as a methodology of political liberation, his “intense examination” of the Grupo de los Trece functioned as a kind of group therapy that implemented a vision for collaborative art practices. Though membership in the Grupo de los Trece shifted over the years, Glusberg stresses that the changes “did not modify – rather, they strengthened – its operations and goals. After all, we had only established a way of belonging to our cultural milieu and an attitude of authentic service to the society in which we live.”⁶³ Indeed, perhaps the most important outcome of Cooper’s time with the Grupo de los Trece was in clarifying a strong political relationship between art and praxis and in defining artists as producers of “models for a new society.” The Grupo de los Trece offered a utopian strategy to “overcome the modern split between art and life.”

SYSTEMS AND POLITICS

In May 1972, the Grupo de los Trece exhibited together for the first time as a group, with guest contributions, at the third Coltejer Biennial in Medellín. Like the Di Tella Institute and the São Paulo Bienal, the Coltejer Biennial represented the interests of private industry in drawing international attention to Latin American art. Sponsored by Rodrigo Uribe Echavarría, chairman of Medellín’s largest textile company, Coltejer celebrated its 60th anniversary with the First Ibero-American Painting Biennial in 1968. By 1970, the biennial had broadened its scope to include non-painted works, invited

⁶² GT 213-A.

⁶³ *CAYC Group at the Museum of Rio de Janeiro*, 5.

foreign curators and critics, and advertised internationally through articles and columns in *Art in America* and *Artforum*. Jasia Reichardt, an important figure at CAYC since her 1968 exhibition *Cybernetic Serendipity* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, curated the biennial's third (and last) iteration along with Brian O'Doherty and Gillo Dorfles, another long-time supporter and collaborator of CAYC.⁶⁴ In an introduction to the 1970 biennial catalogue, Uribe stressed his role in cultivating art in America and his "obligations to diverse sectors of the community," adding, "it is essential to conceive of a private company as a service, as a factor of development, projecting into the community."⁶⁵ Parallel with the Brazilian industrialist Francisco Mattarazo Sobrinho, who organized the first Bienal Internacional de São Paulo in 1951 (as I will discuss later), Uribe imagined a symbiotic relationship between private enterprise as a modernizing, transformative force that is "dynamic, yielding to evolution, profoundly receptive, influenced by renewing forces that are changing the world through scientific and technical progress," and art, which "suffers from constant, rapid evolution."

The biennial was non-traditional in its format, eschewing official entries in favor of the "personal testimony" (as opposed to national representation) of artists grouped in four thematic sections: Figurative Art, Non-figurative Art, Technological and Scientific Art, and Conceptual Art. Director Leonel Estrada, in his essay, emphasized a non-competitive spirit that served to bind diverse practices from all over Latin America in a distinct cultural contribution, not just locally, but, "thanks to the critics, writers, and journalists present, transcending to the international level and reaffirming the purpose of promoting the development of the Art of America."⁶⁶ This non-competitive spirit may

⁶⁴ Gillo Dorfles curated exhibitions of the Grupo de los Trece, wrote curatorial texts that were distributed as *gacetillas*, gave lectures and seminars at the EAE, and participated in symposia abroad, such as the Second International Open Encounter on Video in Paris.

⁶⁵ Coltejer, *Tercera Bienal de Arte Coltejer*, Medellín, Colombia, 1972, 7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

have inspired the jury's decision to reorganize the first, second, and third prize winnings into six equal sums awarded non-hierarchically to six works (not artists) of equal value. In spite of the special attention given to CAYC's presence, in the catalogue and at the biennial, its artists were not among the six winners, and only one artist, Carlos Ginzburg, received special mention by the jury.

Introducing CAYC's entry to the biennial, a broad exhibition titled *Hacia un perfil del arte latinoamericano (Toward a Profile of Latin American Art)*, Glusberg draws distinctions between the theories and methodologies of European and North American conceptualism and the applications of its methods in the "Third World." In defining a unified Latin American art, Glusberg did not attempt formal groupings, but took shared political conditions as a basis for connecting diverse practices. "Latin American art as such does not exist," he wrote, "but there exist problems which are particularly Latin American and they emerge as a consequence of its present revolutionary state."⁶⁷ Here Cooper's influence is evident in identifying a commonality of purpose against cultural imperialism (among the "problems which are particularly Latin American") as well as in Glusberg's proposed methods for addressing them. The exhibition, he hoped, would establish models of production that would directly address those problems, "generating a network of communication in the process of conscious-raising."⁶⁸ Such an approach would attend to the role of social context in defining a Latin American canon, as opposed to the Pan-Americanism conceived by the Cuban critic José Gómez Sicre and based essential formal qualities.⁶⁹ As the Director of the Visual Arts Division of the Pan American Union, Gómez Sicre promoted a panorama of hemispheric

⁶⁷ GT 133.

⁶⁸ Fundación OSDE, *Arte de sistemas*, 67. Translation mine.

⁶⁹ Claire Fox examines Gómez Sicre's efforts to create a hemispheric arts circuit in the Americas in *Making Art Panamerican: Cultural Policy and the Cold War* (2013).

exchange which at times seemed to align with Glusberg's desires for geographic reorientation: "the young American artist knows that international art centers are being born in his own continent and now has as obligatory reception points New York and Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro and Lima, Mexico City and São Paulo, Caracas and Washington...Paris has stopped being 'the center' in order to become 'another center.'"⁷⁰ However, the two diverge where the political *function* of Gómez Sicre's Pan-Americanism – of a hemispheric art as ideological "weapon" in the context of the Cold War – comes up against political *methods*. In this regard, Glusberg's collective approach to the "present revolutionary state" shaping Latin American subjectivity might align better with Che Guevara's New Man, a Latin American subject who has arrived at a consciousness of himself as a social being shaped by structures of management and production. Networks of communication among artists would then contribute to a "process of conscious-raising," though Glusberg does not problematize the biennial as both a node in this network and a structure of management.

Luis Pazos' series of "photoperformances," titled *Transformaciones de masas en vivo*, addressed the contested presence of young bodies in public spaces as many Latin American governments struggled to quash the "present revolutionary state." In the photographs, groups of students from the Colegio Nacional de La Plata posed in groupings according to Pazos' instructions (fig. 11). In one photograph, their bodies form the letters PV, referencing a Peronist youth organization and the popular mantra "Perón Vuelve" ("Perón will return"). In another, they are lined up and laid out across a railroad track, the fragility of their bodies submitting to a sacrificial mandate to "poner el cuerpo" – to give or discipline the body either for the state or toward a revolutionary cause. Their bodies anticipate death, but their closed eyes suggest that it may already have come, and

⁷⁰ Quoted in Fox, "The Hemispheric Routes of 'El Nuevo Arte Nuestro.'"

hint at the increasingly evident state disposal of “subversive” bodies. Other photographs do not take pains to organize the bodies, capturing them strewn across an open plaza or in a careless pile, from above as if in surveillance. Later, Pazos reproduced each photograph individually and circulated them as postcards.⁷¹ Indeed, according to Graciela Sarti, many of the students pictured had disappeared by 1976, giving the mail art a confrontational charge as it was dispatched by the very state that had dispatched them.

In a *gacetilla* announcing the exhibition, a block quote references Louis Althusser’s structural Marxism and his theorization of “ideological practice.” Rather than ideology as false consciousness, from which Guevara’s New Man awakens to a revolutionary state, Althusser theorized ideology as a set of material practices inscribing a symbolic order onto society. Only a rigorous “scientific” approach to society, economics, and history would reveal the ways rituals and performances, or “ideological practices,” interpellate individuals as subjects. For Althusser, a great work of art acts on ideology by allowing for new means of perception, exposing the reproduction of existing conditions of production. In building “a profile of Latin American art,” Glusberg located Latin American subjectivity in shared colonial histories, economic captivity, and authoritarian political systems. Though his engagement with Althusser is not very precise in the *gacetillas*, defining characteristics of Latin American art along these lines seems to have allowed Glusberg to establish a criticism of those practices with the goal of modifying Latin American subjects’ relationship with the world. Pazos’ photoperformances illustrate the disciplining and disposal of Latin American bodies as ideological practices that, per Althusser, interpellate Latin American subjectivity. This turn, toward art as critique of Althusserian notions of ideology and its production of

⁷¹ According to Longoni, “Action Art in Argentina from 1960: The Body (Ex)posed.”

subjects, marked an increasingly prevalent theme of the Grupo de los Trece's new aesthetics: "art and ideology."

In practice, the flow of *gacetillas* from CAYC to institutions around the world functioned as ersatz mail art, as a form of correspondence with "peers" in a decentralized material and imagined network. If what characterizes mail art, as Zanna Gilbert has defined it, is not only that it traveled through the postal system but that the journey is an elemental part of the work and contributes to its meaning, Glusberg's mailed *gacetillas* produce meaning as a system that traces a global itinerary. In mapping a geographic network, the *gacetillas* also made use of ordering systems – the logic of sorting and logistics of delivery – as medium.⁷² Early mail art works in Argentina date to the *Experiencias 69* exhibition at Di Tella, and CAYC artists Edgardo Antonio Vigo and Carlos Ginzburg were early local progenitors of the practice. Mail art, with its simultaneous openness and discretion, reaches out for community "like messages in a bottle," as the Chilean mail artist Eugenio Dittborn has said. Though their recipients were largely institutions, the necessity behind the *gacetillas* – that is, Glusberg's insistence on CAYC's presence in a global community – might even be read as a kind of institutional critique. They pushed into art institutions where the Grupo de los Trece and its art could not, arriving furtively on a postal truck and taking up uninvited, permanent residence in museum archives and libraries.

Hacia un perfil del arte latinoamericano itself expanded on the virtual gacetilla network by touring through the mail. Works were reproduced as heliografic copies, sized

⁷² Gilbert argues that mail art in South America developed from an engagement with experimental poetry, theories of language, and concerns with "systems of all kinds – postal, linguistic, epistemological, bureaucratic, political" – rather than from knowledge of Ray Johnson's or Fluxus' love of the mail. These artists' "interest in semiotic systems led them to concerns that overlap with the language experiments of conceptual art, which then merged easily with the internationalizing mail art networks that developed related aesthetic investigations." See "Genealogical Diversions."

according to Argentine postal regulations, and distributed to venues simultaneously with instructions on installation.⁷³ Like Lippard's suitcase shows, the portable (or in this case, postal) exhibition further marginalized the status of the object, using its portability and reproducibility to undermine the market forces that fetishized both art and the rarefied social space of art institutions. The exhibition itself might thus constitute a conceptual practice or form of mail art, in which the flow of critical ideas through state postal systems and across contested geopolitical borders took precedence over the installation of the exhibition as product.

When *Hacia un perfil del arte latinoamericano* opened at CAYC in June, Pazos and Juan Carlos Romero organized a corresponding symposium titled "El arte como conciencia en la Argentina." An expanded checklist included works such as Juan Downey's *Grape Boycott*, in support of Mexican-American grape harvesters in California, and the Guerrilla Art Action Group's *Communique. June 24, 1971*, addressed to the United Nations Secretary General and calling for the destruction of capitalist institutions and the self-empowerment of the ecologically oppressed. Touring to Quito, Lima, and Cordoba, Argentina, the exhibition trafficked in a sense of solidarity among people living in a borderless system with the economic and historical consequences of the label "Latin American." However, in a biennial context, and in the art institutions in Madrid, Warsaw, Reykjavik, and the United States where it later opened, Glusberg's unified *Profile of Latin American Art* functioned in a different system, expressing a cohesive set of Latin American political problems to an outside public; articulating the politics of resistance to ideological regimes only increased CAYC's prestige abroad. Thus, despite its exhibition in art institutions around South America, the consolidation of

⁷³ The only original version of the mailed exhibition is preserved in the "Alternative Traditions in the Contemporary Arts" project at the University of Iowa.

an idea of Latin American art around a set of shared political problems seems to have primarily served to address an international audience. In this sense, Glusberg's outward mode of address expanded on Rafael Squirru's internationalism of the previous decade, promoting a borderless Latin American conceptual mode to the international art world. As shared revolutionary spirit transformed, yet again, into shared conditions of violent repression, CAYC reoriented its gaze to examine "ideological practices" on a local level.

Hacia un perfil del arte latinoamericano generated a series of related programs at the Escuela de Altos Estudios profiling those "problems which are particularly Latin American": a seminar taught by Abraham Moles called "Hacia una Sociología de los Objetos," a lecture by Eduardo Rabossi called "Hacia un Perfil de la Filosofía en Latinoamérica," and a symposium called "Hacia un Perfil de Música en Latinoamérica." The exhibition thus established a point of departure for exploring the political conditions that mobilized (and limited) inquiry in Latin America. For instance, the gacetilla announcing Rabossi's lecture wonders, "Does Latin American philosophy exist?", appraising both the state of the field in August 1972 and a colonial epistemology that favored "imported theory." At CAYC, answering such a question required taking stock of the system in which a local epistemology would take shape, and the ways in which a "Latin American philosophy" would develop in response to that system. The gacetilla goes on to ask, "What is the position of the philosopher in our environment and how he can be a protagonist in a process of liberation? Is there a contradiction between his activity, essentially theoretical, and an active political praxis?" These are questions that the Grupo de los Trece might also have asked about the role of art and praxis relative to ideological practices.

Gacetillas that followed the exhibition demonstrate the Grupo de los Trece's increasingly consolidated interest in addressing political problems directly. In June 1972,

Luis Pazos and Juan Carlos Romero gave a talk at CAYC titled “El arte como conciencia en la Argentina,” in which they proposed that the role of an artist is to “awaken and clarify the conscience” of the people regarding the current reality in Argentina. Exposing the operations of ideological practice would require “reflection on dependency, underdevelopment and violence.”⁷⁴ Another *gacetilla* authored by Horacio Zabala, also from June 1972, poses a series of “Seventeen Questions about Art” that establish a relationship between art and political problems.⁷⁵ The summer was full of conflict; police killings and left-wing guerrilla violence culminated with the Trelew Massacre on August 22, 1972.

In September, the Grupo de los Trece returned to the street with an exhibition that paralleled *Escultura, follaje y ruidos (Sculpture, Foliage, and Noise)*, held in Plaza Rubén Darío two years earlier. This iteration, *Arte e ideología: CAYC al aire libre (Art and Ideology: CAYC Outdoors)*, opened in the Plaza Roberto Arlt at the corner of Rivadavia Avenue and Esmerelda Street on September 23, 1972.⁷⁶ If the first exhibition was driven primarily by an exploration of dematerialized practices, it was this time driven by a sense of impending emergency. The Grupo de los Trece staged installations and performances in a space of public encounter, where the artists could “mingle with passers-by, with couples making love, with groups of students, with children playing in the plaza – ultimately, with everyday life” (figs. 12-13). Some works, such as Luis Pazos’, took a stance of overt protest, others of mourning. For *La realidad subterránea*, produced with Roberto Duarte Laferrière, Eduardo Leonetti, and Ricardo Roux, Pazos

⁷⁴ GT 138.

⁷⁵ GT 135.

⁷⁶ The outdoor exhibition opened in conjunction with the concurrent CAYC exhibition *Arte de Sistemas II at the Museum of Modern Art of Buenos Aires*.

“painted” a row of sixteen crosses in lime at the entrance to an underground public toilet (fig. 14). Each cross memorialized the execution of a political prisoner at Rawson Penitentiary, killed in the Trelew Massacre after attempting to escape. Pazos papered the stairwell and subterranean restroom with images of the Holocaust, enveloping visitors as they descended into an *ambitacion* of underground “reality” – that is, a comparison that illuminated the invisible “reality” of political violence. Horacio Zabala echoed this memorial tone with *Trecientos metros de cinta negra para enlutar una plaza pública*, wrapping a section of the plaza in black ribbon (fig. 15). The minimal gesture intervened on its environment to encircle the void of the plaza, highlighting the organization of social space while reclaiming its invisible contents as memorial.

Mirtha Dermisache, a contributing artist “invited” by the Grupo de los Trece, distributed *Diario (Newspaper)*, an illegible broadsheet filled with symbols but devoid of any actual content. Like the *arte de los medios* already discussed, *Diario* pointed to the performative construction of an official narrative through the press and the semiotics of authority. Through these works, Glusberg wrote, the artists were “realizing the emerging reality of the social and political process of the moment.”⁷⁷ In another *gacetilla*, he wrote, “feeling very close to the national problem, the artists have wanted through this show to portray a reality indissolubly linked to the new forms of behavior that are being generated by the process in which we Argentines are living.”⁷⁸ Interestingly, both statements make use of a loaded term in Argentina: “process.” Though the “Proceso de Reorganización Nacional,” the official name for the period of state terrorism under the military government led by Jorge Rafael Videla, would not officially begin until the coup of March 1976, Glusberg’s use alludes to the ways in which the language of order and

⁷⁷ Fundación OSDE, *Arte de sistemas*, 34-35. Translation mine.

⁷⁸ GT 166-A.

bureaucracy began to take on insidious meaning in a context of increasing instability. The desire to leave the controlled environment of the gallery space in favor of the chance encounters of the street might be read both as a gesture meant to undermine the politics of exclusive art institutions as well as an act of resistance within increasingly disciplined public spaces.

Diana Taylor has examined in depth the performance of authoritarian politics and nation-ness through the tactics by which Argentina's military governments reduced and policed public space. She writes, "Instead of encouraging people to demonstrate on the streets and overflow the plazas in shows of political support [as they had for Perón], the juntas emptied the streets and plazas."⁷⁹ Conceptualizing such spaces as part of a "theater of operations," she describes the police's discouragement of public gathering and surveillance of empty streets and plazas as part of a larger strategy by which citizens "internalized the surveillance, monitoring themselves to ensure that they were acting correctly."⁸⁰ Though the kidnappings and killings that enforced these policies would not reach their height until a few years later, the staging of a group art exhibition in the public sphere was in itself an act that countered fearful retreat into the private sphere.

Victor Grippo's aforementioned oven (see figs. 2-3), with its emphasis on traditional methods and collective work, might thus carry a more subversive charge than even Pazos' protest works. Taylor writes that "the entry into a neoliberal economy required the creation of a social body that would accelerate production yet obediently dissociate itself from the financial fruits of its labor."⁸¹ Jorge Gamarra, Grippo's collaborator, later remembered the importance of including a tradesman, A. Rossi, in the

⁷⁹ Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, 94.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

construction of the traditional wood-burning oven as a valuation of his skills and reevaluation of the worker as artist: “Rossi was thrilled. He didn’t have a clear idea of whether an oven just like his at home was a sculpture, a work of art, or not. He asked himself if the oven he had at home was a work of art...”⁸² The *horno popular* works against this dissociation from production, recovering the communitarian elements of building, cooking and eating – slowly, radically, in public. In an interview, Gamarra said, “We two drank a bit of wine while the others finished the oven...The idea was to make bread for ourselves and the group of artists, but a huge crowd formed.” Giving away bread to those who ask, and socializing the knowledge of how to make it, shifts emphasis from the object to the process. As Ana Longoni writes, “giving out bread while it is still hot, having just been baked in an oven that has just been made, underlines that this is the product of an unfinished, present act: “to be making.”⁸³

When the municipal police closed the show only two days after it opened, a bomb squad surrounded the Plaza and seized the works. The *horno popular*, along with all other works, was destroyed in the Plaza and “taken to an unknown destination in an official truck” – that is, given the same treatment as untold disappeared bodies. Though chroniclers commonly point to *La realidad subterránea* as having provoked the censure, one suspects that the *horno popular* functioned as a more potent symbol. The police communiqué read, “what we have defined as art has not been exhibited,” suggesting the consolidation of an official position on what did and did not constitute “art.” While a careful examination of this official position would attend to the shifting objectives of successive regimes and would thus comprise a separate (but needed) research project altogether, it is worth noting here that the government’s construction and performance of

⁸² Interview with Ana Longoni in Pacheco, *Grippe*, 285.

⁸³ Pacheco, *Grippe*, 286.

national myths informed the acceptability of certain modes of art. It mobilized the denotative power of narrative painting to visualize fascist fantasies of “tradition,” “civilization,” and racial purity.⁸⁴ Such “imitative arts” (to borrow Barthes’ phrase) connoted a certain normative nationalism and become performative tools of communicating national patrimony and citizen formation, as Dermisache highlighted, that claims a totality or unity of meaning. A later article in the Buenos Aires daily *Clarín*, reporting on the closure of the exhibition, explains that the police believed “artistic expression had been distorted, giving it a subversive character.”⁸⁵ Perhaps a more precise report would stipulate that CAYC’s exhibition had undermined art’s claim to totality of meaning and the government’s authority of interpretation. Interestingly, the article also reports that Glusberg had obtained permits for the exhibition from the same municipal police who later shut it down, highlighting again the “theater of operations” that relied on a spectacle of control over public spaces.

In a *gacetilla* announcing the show (tellingly, in English and three months late), another introductory quotation from Althusser theorizes art as “a modification of the ‘relationship with the world.’ A great work of art is that one which, while acting upon an ideology, keeps away from it in order to establish a criticism of the ideology which it elaborates, to refer to a means of perceiving, feeling, hearing, etc., which once free from the latent myths of existing ideology, will excel over same.”⁸⁶ Glusberg extrapolates from this quotation to describe, presumably to English-speaking audiences outside Argentina, the Grupo de los Trece’s “methodology of art as an idea, promoting a conceptual system through which it would be possible to approach an explanation of the actual structure and

⁸⁴ An example of this type of art would be Angel del Valle’s famous painting *La vuelta del malón*, 1892. For a full history of the ideological vicissitudes of successive regimes of this period, see David Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina* (1993).

⁸⁵ “Arte y Política: El Levantamiento de una Muestra Plástica No Tuvo Fundamento Legal.”

⁸⁶ Jorge Glusberg. GT 166-A

operation of the system we live in Argentina.”⁸⁷ Indeed, the works in *Arte e ideología: CAYC al aire libre* exposed the “operation of the system” that circumscribed the possibilities of everyday life in Argentina. They provoked an official response from police, who published a statement clarifying that “political demonstrations by citizens are not only forbidden...they are prohibited by law.”⁸⁸

Glusberg, who may have been detained by police after they closed the exhibition, wrote and circulated a description of events, “Comunicado No. 2: Clausura de la Muestra ‘CAYC al Aire Libre,’” asking for support from local and international figures. In another effort that might be considered mail art in itself, several other “comunicados” reproduced the telegrams and letters that soon arrived from John Baldessari and Allan Kaprow, Timm Ulrichs, Jochen Gerz, Ed Ruscha, Dan Graham, Joseph Kosuth, Larry Bell, Richard Kostelanetz, Dick Higgins, Franco Vaccari Claudio Parmiggiani, Hélio Oiticia, and Jasia Reichardt, among others.⁸⁹ They were addressed to the President, General Alejandro Agustín Lanusse, though one suspects they had little effect. In his letter, Higgins wrote, somewhat condescendingly, “Except in music, Argentina has not been known for its avant-garde art, and has been of very little international relevance, before Jorge Glusberg and CAYC. Their activities have given great respect and prestige to your country....Prosecuting him with any serious charge would be very frowned upon by artists, writers and all those related to culture around the world and this will reflect on your administration and on the prestige of Argentina. I’m sure you will agree and personally intercede to revise the measures taken.”⁹⁰ Whether or not Higgins convinced the President to “revise the measures taken” by the police, he did express a certain

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ “Arte y Política: El Levantamiento de una Muestra Plástica No Tuvo Fundamento Legal.”

⁸⁹ CAYC. “Comunicado n° 4” and “Comunicado n° 5.”

⁹⁰ Alonso et al., *Sistemas, acciones y procesos, 1965-1975*, 243.

affirmation of CAYC's membership in a club of "artists, writers, and all those related to culture around the world." A more important upshot, moreover, may have been to sharpen, in political relief, Glusberg's and CAYC's role in a global network of conceptualism. Though he likely conceived the exhibition as introspective, a close reading of local conditions on the ground, in an external context the police response attested to the necessity of art that revealed those conditions. The police response played seamlessly into CAYC's extended investigation of the relationship between "art and ideology," supporting their claims to express for a global audience the harsh realities of their country's present political moment.

Moreover, Glusberg's deft handling of the closure of *Arte e ideología: CAYC al aire libre* brings to the surface a question that lingers under the surface of all of CAYC's activities during this period: the discomfiting fact that CAYC remained open throughout Argentina's worst dictatorships. Though the tactics of General Lanusse's regime would pale in comparison to the extreme state terror of General Videla's junta several years later, it is hard not to wonder how Glusberg managed to keep CAYC and its artists alive, much less free to make critical work. In this regard the elusiveness or open-endedness of conceptual art may have helped thwart an official reading, or the vagaries of context may have allowed it to be read unspecifically, but lectures and symposia like the one organized by Pazos and Romero seem, in retrospect, like dangerous propositions. There is no archival evidence that might help illuminate this question; Glusberg likely negotiated a shifting social climate with improvised maneuvers, measuring the possibilities of what might be allowed and considering the visibility of CAYC on an international stage. I have heard of a secretary masterful in obstruction and delay. Others have pointed to Glusberg's lighting business, which apparently supplied highway modernization through government contracts and may have afforded him a blind eye

from the authorities.⁹¹ These questions, of course, extend to each artist in the Grupo de los Trece, and the degree to which he echoed or chafed against Glusberg's voice, narrating the activities of CAYC from the pages of the *gacetillas*. These questions come up against the limits of the archive. As most of the artists involved with CAYC have died, a more candid or nuanced portrait of the group's dynamic may never emerge.

Some scholars have been critical of the ways in which Glusberg's strategies of self-promotion have aligned with what, at times, seems like official cooperation. Considering the critical charge of many CAYC works from this period, and the revolutionary spirit of its lectures and symposia, it would be an unfair to charge him with enjoying the benefits of dictatorship. However, over the decade, CAYC's increasing celebrity abroad created a context in which its work was embraced at home and even developed associations with official culture. Those associations have lingered, though they are also evidence of the ways contexts are always shifting, allowing for new frames of reference and contingent readings. For works such as Grippo's *Analogía I* or *Construcción de un horno popular para hacer pan* – even for Pazos' *La realidad subterránea* – a reliance on contextual or discursive meaning undermines the determinacy of any interpretation. The critical currency of the objects and their presentation fluctuates across different historical and institutional contexts such that they could provoke closure and arrest in 1972 and win a Grand Prize at the São Paulo Bienal in 1977.

⁹¹ In his book *Arts Under Pressure*, Joost Smiers writes, “During the dictatorship period [Glusberg] had excellent relations with the military government. His exhibitions abroad were officially promoted while, at the same time, many artists were being tortured, killed, or forced to leave the country as refugees. Néstor García Canclini remarks that Jorge Glusberg is a master when it comes to feeling which way the wind is blowing politically” (46). In an essay in the anthology *On Edge: The Crisis of Contemporary Latin American Culture*, Canclini adds, “When the military government came to power in 1976, they officially promoted his exhibitions. Glusberg's company, Modulor, received a contract to install stadium lighting for the World Soccer Cup in Argentina in 1978” (36).

Importantly, this shift in signification took place outside of Argentina. After 1972, *Hacia un perfil del arte latinoamericano* traveled to the Galería Amadís in Madrid, the Współczesna Gallery in Warsaw, the Galleria Toselli in Milan, and the Dudley Peter Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin College. Smaller exhibitions of CAYC artists opened at the Galerie Paramedia in Berlin, Illinois Bell Telephone Co. in Chicago, Museo de Ciencias y Artes at UNAM in Mexico City, Espace Pierre Cardin in Paris, Galería Halvat Huvit in Helsinki, the International Cultureel Centrum in Antwerp, Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, and Agora Studio in Maastricht, along with contributions to shows in Buffalo, Zagreb, Reykjavik, and Hamburg, all in 1974. The year began with CAYC artists participating in the conference “Open Circuits: The Future of Television” at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in January, followed by a presentation of video-tapes at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago in March, and ended with the Rencontre Internationale de Video at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London.⁹²

An extremely unstable period in Argentina, with the return of Perón, his death, the succession of his wife to the presidency, and the military junta’s final coup d’etat all transpiring between 1973-1976, may explain this shift abroad. *Gacetillas* from these years were increasingly written in English and advertise CAYC’s achievements elsewhere. The gallery space in Buenos Aires continued to host the activities of the Escuela de Altos Estudios, performances and readings, and art exhibitions – though its speakers and artists were largely invited guests from foreign countries. One important exception to this activity abroad was the impromptu exhibition *Homenaje a Salvador Allende*, which interrupted *Arte de Sistemas* at CAYC in September 1973, following the coup d’etat in Chile (“nuestro pais hermano”). As a “modest homage” to the “American leader lamentably disappeared,” CAYC exhibited recent work by Chilean artists. The

⁹² See GT 349 and GT 359.

gacetilla announcing the cancellation of *Arte de Sistemas* also questioned the feasibility of four upcoming seminars to be led by visiting Chilean scholars. Nemesio Antúnez, a painter, architect, and director of the newly renovated Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago, had “received, one month earlier, the exhibition *Hacia un perfil del arte latinoamericano*, made up of 143 works, which CAYC donated to the Museum.” CAYC also retired *Arte de Sistemas*, which was scheduled to travel to Santiago at the end of the year; the *gacetilla* concluded, “tampoco sabemos qué va a suceder” (“we do not know what will happen”).⁹³

Indeed, events in Chile foreshadowed the political fate of Argentina and much of Latin America. As conditions worsened for artists (among other groups), several members of the Grupo de los Trece left the country, reducing the roster to nine: Bedel, Bedit, Grippo, Glusberg, Maler, Marotta, González Mir, Portillos, and Testa. As it toured the United States and Europe, the Grupo CAYC, as it was known from 1975 on, physically entered the institutional network to which its *gacetillas* had previously sought entry. The emphasis on video works reinforced CAYC’s fluency in an international vocabulary of experimentation, allowing it to speak for Latin America to the art “world.” And the message that international institutions received is evident in the ways in which traveling exhibitions were framed and rewarded, with such prizes as the gold medal at *Peace 75*, a Slovenian exhibition commemorating the 30th anniversary of the United Nations with a section devoted to “Problems of Latin American Art.” Interest in Latin American art seems to have been concerned with uncovering a true expression of the harsh realities of the political present. However pigeonholed it was abroad, circulation in major international institutions strengthened CAYC’s claim to a top register of artistic

⁹³ GT 285.

recognition, which in turn reinforced its instrumental role in developing conceptual art in Argentina.

There is a nationalist element to CAYC's self-fashioning, by which it worked to make Argentina relevant to an international scene of cultural legitimation, and that ultimately aligns CAYC at this moment with the objectives of both the São Paulo Bienal and Argentina's dictatorship. It is through this alignment that CAYC could be embraced by official culture at the height of its suppression of dissidence. And, though CAYC participated in international boycotts of the 1973 and 1975 São Paulo biennials in protest of Brazil's military dictatorship, it is because of this alignment that the biennial's organizing body specially invited the Grupo CAYC in 1977. Through international circuits of legitimation (of which the São Paulo Bienal is a part), CAYC had entered a new system that transformed the frameworks for interpretation of its art. Treating CAYC's presence at the São Paulo Bienal as a moment of (putative) official sanction demonstrates the ways in which systems, or contexts of circulation, determine meaning. The "political" content that was subversive enough to elicit police interruption, and then travel the world as an essential representation of the revolutionary spirit of Latin America, was, in this case, irrelevant. CAYC's cultural legitimation abroad neutralized whatever dissident meanings its works contained, and reinscribed their symbolic value as signs of Argentina's currency in global art movements.

The rehabilitation of CAYC illustrates the depoliticizing effects of these processes of circulation and display. It also illustrates the imperative – or perhaps ambivalent – role of politics in narratives about Latin American art. Glusberg used this tension to his advantage, marketing the "ideological conceptualism" of Latin America to international audiences, while in Argentina he shrewdly promoted CAYC's engagement with global conceptualism as an expression of Argentina's relevance to contemporary movements.

Both strategies make use of the political as a point of entry into real and imagined networks of circulation and display. The internal and external curatorial contexts that Glusberg negotiated make clear that, while CAYC's ideological concerns may have developed from avant-garde practices specific to Argentina, they also found currency in global vocabularies of conceptualism. However, the reliance of these art objects on contextual or discursive meaning (which is perhaps a constitutive element defining conceptual art more broadly) undermines any possibility for fixed meaning. It also complicates the local/international, institutional/anti-institutional, formal/ideological, radical/complicit frameworks from which they have been analyzed. CAYC itself occupies this uneven terrain of signification. It circles inevitably back to the question with which I began this section: "What is the CAYC?" The *gacetillas* reveal the complicated web that, much more than the physical gallery space, school, or even Glusberg, embodies CAYC. They reach through time and space like tentacles, switching solicitously between languages and reassuring us of CAYC's importance. They remain, though CAYC does not. Paradoxically, the ephemera outlives the physical institution and its members: "What is [left of] the CAYC" gathers dust in library storage.

CAYC and the Problem of Ideology: *Signos en ecosistemas artificiales* at the São Paulo Bienal

BIENNIAL POLITICS

The question of mapping the local onto the international is as central to the history of the São Paulo Bienal as it is to the identity of CAYC. The Brazilian industrialist Francisco Mattarazo Sobrinho, who organized the first Bienal Internacional de São Paulo in 1951, explicitly modeled it on the Venice Biennale. Mattarazo had partnered with Nelson Rockefeller and the Museum of Modern Art in New York three years prior to found the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM-SP), which sponsored the new biennial and shaped its emphasis on modern art. While Rockefeller's principal role in founding MAM-SP links the institution inextricably to projects of American cultural expansion under the Good Neighbor Policy, modern art also emblemized Brazil's incipient modernity and played an important role in visualizing its entrance into international economic partnerships. Both the museum and biennial were thus products of a period of correlation between American cultural involvement in the hemisphere and Brazilian internationalist aspirations, and have "always been intended to indicate Brazil's competent modernism to an international clientele."⁹⁴ As biennial historian Isobel Whitelegg has noted, the Bienal's prizes were sponsored by companies seeking to share "in a new regime of transnational development, ushering in an influential generation of industry-linked patrons whose philanthropic intentions could not be divorced from a vested interest in forming international economic partnerships."⁹⁵ Held after 1953 in the Oscar Niemeyer-designed Ciccillo Mattarazo Pavilion, the biennial was identical in

⁹⁴ Weiss, "Some Notes on the Agency of Exhibitions," 122.

⁹⁵ Whitelegg, "The Bienal Internacional de São Paulo." See also Nelson, "Monumental and Ephemeral: The Early São Paulo Bienais" and Whitelegg, "Brazil, Latin America, the World."

format to Venice's, with both national presentations and international exhibitions. The largest exhibition spaces were given to Brazil, the United States, France, and Italy, and early exhibitions tended to minimize Brazil's relationship to other Latin American countries, which historically received little emphasis.

Though the biennial separated from MAM-SP in 1961, Mattarazo remained director of the Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, its organizing body, until 1975. The separation entailed a shift from private museum patronage to public support in the form of city and state funding. Beginning in 1967, the effects of this shift in control became evident, when the new military government removed a work by the Brazilian artist Cybele Varela. During Emílio Garrastazu Médici's military government, the Brazilian critic (and former biennial curator) Mário Pedrosa first called for an international boycott, and, Whitelegg writes, "by 1971 the boycott had successfully appropriated the exhibition's international prestige, or, rather, participating in the Bienal, co-sponsored by Brazil's right-wing military regime, had come to be seen as a dubious ambition for any politically engaged artist."⁹⁶ The boycotts continued through the 1970s, and managed to deflect much of the biennial's coverage in the international press, though artists continued to participate, and the biennial remained active.

CAYC had not participated during the boycott years under pressure from a group called Movement for Latin American Cultural Independence (MICLA), of which Luis Wells, Luis Camnitzer, Carla Stellweg, Liliana Porter, and Teodoro Maus were members. In 1971, an artist's group called the Museo Latinoamericano worked with MICLA to produce the self-published book *Contrabiennial*, which circulated as an alternative exhibition comprised of prints, letters, and evidence of political repression. In *Contrabiennial*, Gordon Matta-Clark published an open letter exhorting artists to withdraw

⁹⁶ Whitelegg, "The Bienal de São Paulo: Unseen/Undone (1969—1981)."

their works from the Bienal, which “shamefully lent weight to that totalitarian government and its allies.”⁹⁷ The letter also implicates Glusberg, in his role of inviting artists to participate through the CAYC exhibition *Arte de Sistemas*:

Of those who were invited by Jorge Glusberg to participate in the São Paulo Bienal, the majority have already expressed their intention to withdraw their work, maintaining the boycott of 1970... the dubious way Glusberg handled this issue has seriously damaged the attractiveness of the show he has proposed in Buenos Aires. It has been suggested that instead of removing work from both exhibitions, the group is encouraged to exhibit at the same time in Argentina, making a firm collective statement against the situation in Brazil. My feeling is that Glusberg has the full intention of sending the works he receives to São Paulo, and that it is probably no easier to make political statements in Argentina than in Brazil.⁹⁸

The letter, dated May 19, 1971, prompted a reply from Glusberg, also published in *Contrabienal*, titled “Por qué resolví participar en *Art Systems* en la Bienal de San Pablo y ahora desisto.” In it, Glusberg explains his initial concerns about participating in the biennial and why, when Mattarazo invited him to exhibit *Arte como Idea* and *Arte Cibernético*, he later decided to participate.⁹⁹ Writing that he ultimately shared Matta-Clark’s position, and considering complaints from participating artists, Glusberg decided to withdraw the CAYC exhibitions from the biennial. Whatever his motivations, Glusberg surely recognized the expediency of boycotting in solidarity with international artists, and sat out the 1973 and 1975 biennials as well, despite a new section devoted to “Art and Communication” in 1973. “Taking part in the exhibition had been irreversibly cast as an ethical as well as a professional decision,” Whitelogg writes, but largely by American and European artists or Latin Americans living in exile. For Glusberg and for local artists, “the biennials of the 1970s presented a more complex choice, as each edition

⁹⁷ Matta-Clark, “Gordon Matta.” Translation mine.

⁹⁸ Ibid. Translation mine.

⁹⁹ Glusberg, “Jorge Glusberg: Por qué resolví participar en 'Art Systems' en la Bienal de San Pablo y ahora desisto.”

offered a chance not simply to gain prestige, but to continue to work critically and apart from the market.”¹⁰⁰

The view that the São Paulo Bienal offered a space of exposure free of market forces is unconvincing given its historical interest in increasing Brazil’s visibility in international contexts. But the 1977 biennial may indeed have offered new opportunities for criticality, since it was the first edition produced under new leadership following the departure of Mattarazo, who did not allow curators to make substantial changes to display or documentation strategies. In 1977, under new curatorial leadership, the biennial’s organizers sought a stronger emphasis on Latin American (as distinct from Brazilian) art, and extended a special invitation to CAYC, who represented the most current Latin American practices, and could thus bring “Latin America” to Brazil. Under a new curatorial structure, CAYC would be allowed to show independently of the national presentations in a thematic section devoted to “Uncatalogued Art.”¹⁰¹ Though the Grupo CAYC’s entry in 1977 was, again, highly contentious, it was not because they participated, but because they won a Grand Prize – the first given to a Latin American entry in the Bienal’s 27-year history.

SIGNOS EN ECOSISTEMAS ARTIFICIALES

For CAYC’s exhibition at the 1977 biennial, *Signos en ecosistemas artificiales* (*Signs in Artificial Ecosystems*), Glusberg continued to make use of a systems framework for unifying fifteen works by the ten artists of the Grupo CAYC (fig. 16). As the title suggests, the thematic linkages among works derived from their demonstration of the art object’s status as sign within the social space of a biennial. “Every artistic discourse is the

¹⁰⁰ Whitelegg, “The Bienal de São Paulo: Unseen/Undone (1969—1981).”

¹⁰¹ *Catálogo - 14ª Bienal de São Paulo*.

product of a system of rhetorical transformations,” Glusberg wrote in an exhibition catalogue, and “every articulation of artistic space, as a system of signs, is constituted by the different rhetorical possibilities of the historical moment in which the artistic operators act and the media or instruments with which they act.”¹⁰² If the works seemed to have minimized some of their activist charge in pursuit of more formal or semiotic concerns, it may reveal more about the biennial as a site of meaning-making than changes in artistic direction.

Among the themes present in *Signos en ecosistemas artificiales* were the silencing of populations, the disciplining of bodies as they occupy (urban) environments, and unequal access to food and nutrition – issues that read as so political in nature, and so crucial at the time, that they seem to border on reportage. But, as Daniel Quiles has noted, a message is rarely so specific that there is no room to open it up. These thematic concerns could apply to a number of ongoing situations, or even to an overall condition.¹⁰³ Though their classification as “ideological conceptualism” has narrowed the field of interpretation such that these objects are commonly read for their content – or *what* they mean – their concern with structures of communication, the coding of messages, and the variable functions of an object as sign – or *how* they mean – in fact reveals a more important political gesture. *Signos en ecosistemas artificiales* traffics in a Derridian resistance to any singular or authoritative meaning. As I have mentioned, Derrida’s deconstruction of logocentric structures of authority is useful in nuancing the critical charge of CAYC’s work. The critical nature of CAYC’s exhibition at the São Paulo Bienal, I believe, resides not in cleverly-veiled metaphors that express harsh realities of life under dictatorship, but in an unstable semiotic field of interpretation. The

¹⁰² Glusberg, *The Group of Thirteen: XIV Biennial of São Paulo*, Buenos Aires, CAYC, 1977. Cited in Fundación OSDE, *Arte de sistemas*, 44. Translation mine.

¹⁰³ Quiles, “Network of Art and Communication: CAYC as Model.”

found objects, propositions, and performances that comprise *Signos en ecosistemas artificiales* are political because they unfix the semiotics of power and authority.

Luis Benedit, who had built the participatory *Laberinto Invisible* for *Arte de Sistemas* in 1971, continued exploring social behavior in natural and artificial environments. Indeed, this binary encapsulates the thematic preoccupations of the entire exhibition. Benedit this time contributed *Laberinto para ratas blancas*, an artificial habitat in which, to reach their food, rats must traverse an acrylic maze and make a series of “unnatural efforts.” Like his artificial bee habitat, *Laberinto para ratas blancas* explored conditioned responses to stimuli and the environment. A landscape architect who exhibited in *arte povera* circles in Italy before helping found the Grupo CAYC, Benedit frames his interests in *gacetillas* as purely semiotic. However, the Mexican oxolote in *Laberinto Invisible* and the white rats in *Laberinto para ratas blancas* gesture subtly to an interest in the relationship between national myths and citizen formation. Amid the incipient neo-liberalism of the Proceso Nacional, the white rats in a “rat race” gesture not only toward human adaption to and absorption in a code, like language, but also a new economic system that solicited foreign investment. As Glusberg wrote, “The end (perfect adaptation to the code) is the entropy of the system, because it has absorbed the participant into the correct run of the Labyrinth.”¹⁰⁴ The rats, as participants, demonstrate metaphorically the processes of citizen formation under a new social order that promoted consumerism and the marketplace. Benedit’s use of white rats, or rats bred in a laboratory to optimize their adaptability to a system, may also suggest a biopolitics of access and mobility in this new social order, or perhaps the dictatorship’s intertwined capitalist fantasies of racial purity and consumer culture. Here Benedit conceives a

¹⁰⁴ GT 181-A-I

scientific approach, per Althusser, to suggest the role of “ideological practices” in subject formation.

Proyecto Huevos, another work by Bénédict, consisted of a wooden box containing turned wooden eggs inside small niches, with a stuffed hen positioned to face the artificial eggs (fig. 17). This tension between objects in artificial surroundings, and vice versa, speaks to a collapsing of signifier and referent. The grid, a system that manages the hen’s supply of eggs, imposes order on the natural world, turning the hen into a machine of food production. Agriculture and food production figure so centrally to Argentina’s national myths and self-fashioning that, following Bénédict’s logic, food as a symbol takes precedence over food as necessity of life. Is it the real hen or the artificial eggs that function as signifiers in Argentina? To what do they refer?

Jorge González Mir also blurred this distinction – with a more straightforward political metaphor – in his work *Factor interespecífico*, an installation of two-dimensional blackbirds perched inside white birdcages hung from the ceiling and scattered on the floor (see fig. 16). Here, as in the other works, the realness or artificiality of the birds (referent) is of little consequence to their capacity for signification. Vicente Marotta’s *Más y mejores alimentos para el mundo*, an installation of piled sacks of wheat screenprinted with the text “Product of Argentina” or “For Export” (fig. 19), again question the important role of food production in Argentina. In the rarefied social space of the biennial, the slogans of commerce that advertise Argentina’s bounty from the surface of utilitarian wheat sacks take on an ironic tone, pointing instead to the country’s inability to feed its own population. The poverty implied by the gesture undermines the symbol of “Argentina: breadbasket of the world.”

Leopoldo Maler, who trained in theater and dance and worked in television while living in London in the 1960s, joined with the Grupo CAYC to contribute *La Última*

Cena (*The Last Supper*; fig. 18), an installation of a table with white cloth, set for thirteen on one side, as the scene is conventionally composed in painting. Above, thirty cattle and lamb carcasses made of lightweight white plastic hung from a rotating support. Barbed wire encircled the table on the ground, restricting the *mise-en-scène* to be viewed only from a distance. Having participated in the Happenings and *ambitaciones* of Di Tella in the 1960s, Maler became interested in the intersection of theater, dance, and art through a work he titled *Caperucita Rota* (1966). In it, he staged a play with slides, fourteen ballerinas, and a radio announcer in a makeshift Di Tella auditorium. He later directed a film on Minujin's famous installation *La Menesnuda*, and turned increasingly toward video, performance, and multimedia in the 1970s while living in Paris and New York. In *La Ultima Cena*, Maler's intersectional interests are evident. An immersive environment that again conjures national myths and religion, Maler this time plays with the implications of participation. By inviting and then blocking entry, he teases apart the spectator's dual roles of reading and participating in rituals of national identity. The hanging cattle make clear reference to the cornerstone of Argentina's economy and culture, while the (sacrificial) lamb ties the hanging carcasses to the evacuated biblical event below. In an interview, Maler interpreted the Last Supper as a celebratory moment of freedom – that is, a symbol of “freedom as a process and not an object.”¹⁰⁵ The combined elements of celebration and death, order and sacrifice, freedom and threat, connote a complicated affective state of existence under military rule.

Victor Grippo's contribution, *Energía vegetal*, built on themes he had developed since showing *Analogía I* in *Arte de Sistemas*. In another incarnation of the work, *Energía* from 1972 (fig. 21), Grippo wired a potato to a voltmeter, which registers the energy stored inside it. The proposition, perhaps drawing on Grippo's training as a

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Graciela Sarti in Sarti, “Grupo CAyC”.

chemist, is actually a very simple science project: a potato battery. As in *Analogía I*, the voltmeter makes its invisible electricity evident in the material space of the viewer, completing an analogy to human consciousness. The potato, circulating as an art object, takes on a minimal aesthetic as a small, irregular, organic shape, hooked up to spindly black and red wires that feed into a spare, functional voltmeter. A sturdy tuber, yanked from the ground, the potato looks almost delicate in this context, its pocked and bumpy skin prodded by wires. Such an odd juxtaposition might bring to mind the merging technologies of agriculture and industry at this time, and the primacy of agroindustry in Argentina's economy. Grippo's use of humble objects resonates with the attitudes of Minimalism and *arte povera*, though he stipulated to Guy Brett that his work involved "A small amount of material [and] a great amount of imagination: this is the real 'poor means': not the aesthetic Arte Povera!"¹⁰⁶

Brett, a friend of Glusberg and Grippo and frequent interlocutor at CAYC, uncovered for an article remembering Grippo some notes he had taken over long conversations with the artist about his work. Some reveal the global events to which the work responded – Grippo mentioned "a British military secret after the war: a biological battery, giving electricity from the movement of micro-organisms," and "was especially excited by the struggle of the north Vietnamese, and their courageous and ingenious improvisations against the might of the American army. For example, 'The use by the Vietnamese of a specially sensitive person to act as a radar in forward positions to tell of approaching planes.'"¹⁰⁷ But perhaps most illuminating was his "feeling that 'here in Argentina, knowledge is untapped. Many pictographs around Mendoza have never been

¹⁰⁶ Brett, "Material and Consciousness: Grippo's Vision," 419.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

studied. Thousands of items in the Museo de la Plata have not been studied.”¹⁰⁸ His interest in low-tech means seems to value the tactics of the disempowered or disenfranchised (Latin American) subject against the “ideological practices” or political and economic forces of neo-colonialism, Cold War geopolitics, neoliberalism, and the authoritarian nation-state.

As Grippo said, “what has to take place is a modification in the viewer’s form of reflection, since what I try to do is elevate the general tone of simple things not by making them abstract, but by altering hierarchies.”¹⁰⁹ By recontextualizing a potato and altering its status within a hierarchy of social and material values, Grippo exposes what is already contained, invisibly, in an unremarkable object of everyday life. In an early essay on Grippo, Glusberg uncovered this power in the linguistic everyday by conjuring some of the Buenos Aires slang idioms featuring potatoes. “It can define an object of high quality, ‘este traje es una papa’ – ‘this suit is a potato’; or a job easily carried out: ‘Qué papa hacer esos informes’ – ‘what a potato it is to do these reports’ (in English we would say ‘a piece of cake’); or an item of journalistic news of importance that implies a revelation: ‘tengo la papa’ – ‘I have the potato’ (we would say ‘a hot potato’); a beautiful woman – ‘Fulana es una papa’ – ‘Fulana is a potato’ (we might say ‘a dish’), etc.”¹¹⁰ One other interesting connection to language is the dual translation of “papa” as “potato” and “father,” perhaps supporting its spectral presence as a life-giving force of South American ontology or the equally important role of psychoanalysis in Argentina’s cultural arena. In English, however, “small” potatoes generally connote insignificance;

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Conversation between Victor Grippo and Hugo Petruschansky, cited in Pacheco, *Grippo*, 286.

¹¹⁰ Jorge Glusberg, *Victor Grippo*, 11. Cited in Brett, “Material and Consciousness.”

indeed, there is no more fitting descriptor for a “dirt cheap” potato than “povera,” “pobre,” or “poor.”

It through this linguistic linkage that the potato becomes a metonym for the people who farm them, conflating the iconic agricultural contributions of South America with its people. To make just one more linguistic metaphor: a Spanish phrase for an unconscious or cumbersome body is “sack of potatoes,” underscoring the (seemingly) inert or silenced quality of a personified potato and body under repressive political conditions. It is hard, then, not to read the copper and zinc electrodes as reference to state use of electrical torture on political prisoners – practices that were at their peak in Argentina in 1977. Drawing on Grippo’s interest in alchemy, some critics have traced a parallel alchemical process by which he turns a “dirt cheap” potato into a status object, a repository of social value. But, as Daniel Quiles has pointed out, torture is also an alchemical process: the conversion of person into object, citizen into informant.¹¹¹ In spite of this disturbing affective valence, the potato resists an entirely tragic reading; it is so unassuming, so generous in its morphic possibilities, that it seems better suited to the realm of comedy¹¹² than tragedy: the energy stored inside the potato ultimately only works toward powering the voltmeter, which only registers its work. The tautology plays out formally, in the circular visual logic of wires that, in spite of their color-coded, specialized functions, begin and end in the potato. It is a sign system in operation, signifying the essence of the potato: potential energy.

At the São Paulo Bienal, Grippo’s installation *Energía vegetal* (fig. 20) displayed potatoes piled messily atop a table that suggested a laboratory setting, wired together to

¹¹¹ Quiles, “Network of Art and Communication: CAYC as Model.”

¹¹² From pre-Hispanic motifs to Mr. Potato Head, representations of potatoes bearing human traits are cute; they capitalize on a comedic metonymy that distills our essence to our most important part: our head. Ana Longoni discusses pre-Hispanic clay representations of potatoes in her essay “V́ctor Grippo: His Poetry, His Utopia,” in Pacheco, *Grippo*, 287.

amass a powerful current between them. Below, small piles of potatoes fed energy into the larger pile, which then fed wires that came together to power a single voltmeter, mounted in a vitrine against an adjoining wall. Though the tangles of wires do not seem to have been arranged in any aesthetic way, they do disappear behind the wall and reappear, as a single wire, to join up with the voltmeter nearby. Across from this arrangement, another table held an accumulation of potatoes without any attachments, along with specimens, test tubes, and flasks. In contrast to the pile of unwired potatoes on the facing table – an “analogy with science” – the small output of an individual potato multiplied as it connected with another in the pile, an “analogy with conscience[ousness].”¹¹³

The analogy of an expansion of consciousness when one connects with others, is, as in *Energía* and *Analogía I*, completed in the material space of the viewer, “when the potato’s latent energy becomes evident, and the fact that the group as a whole can generate a torrent of energy capable of incurring a transformation becomes unquestionable.”¹¹⁴ The implications of such a simple proposal – the presumably substantial summation of the imperceptible natural energy of potatoes – are both political and poetic. The Argentine critic Miguel Briante later wrote that the installation takes up “the energy inherent in matter to develop a metaphor for consciousness; in order to point out – in very few words – that the brain, that intelligence, is also energy, and that this energy can change the world, and that commitment and freedom are to be found in the acceptance of this energy.”¹¹⁵ In this context, the silent potato, “in very few words,”

¹¹³ Sarti, “Grupo CAyC.”

¹¹⁴ Pacheco, *Grippe*, 286.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

posits a growing Latin American (revolutionary) consciousness or a hopeful course for silenced people living under the ideological practices of dictatorship.

If these political and poetic valences seem evident in retrospect, they were not as obvious, or not as interesting, to press coverage of the exhibition. Argentine and Brazilian media, which covered CAYC's presence at the biennial heavily, focused primarily on the patent absurdity of an art exhibition comprised of sacks of wheat, piles of potatoes, and hanging lamb carcasses. Prior to October 12, when the jury awarded *Signos en ecosistemas artificiales* the biennial's Grand Prize, the exhibition – Grippo's installation in particular – seemed to push the limits of what readers, if not biennial visitors, were willing to accept as art. What the Grand Prize revealed was the extent to which other artists participating in the biennial also questioned the ontological disruption posed by CAYC's exhibition.

A NEGOTIATED POSITION

The Brazilian newspaper *Estado de São Paulo* demonstrated this skepticism with a special section, "O Melhor da Bienal," in its October 12, 1977 edition (fig. 22). The headline for an article reporting on the Grand Prize reads "Stones, Potatoes, Salami, Dirt, Wire Cages, [Cigarette] Butts: The Grand Prize is the Argentines."¹¹⁶ Above, a banner of three images dominates the page with images of the quotidian materials that CAYC called art: a long table covered in potatoes (the unwired half of Grippo's *Energía vegetal* installation), shot from below to exaggerate its length; a pile of rocks; an overhead shot of small pieces included in Alfredo Portillos' ritual space. The image of Grippo's long stretch of potatoes, which highlights its minimal formal qualities as it seems to poke fun

¹¹⁶ "O Melhor Da Bienal."

at the work, reappeared on the cover of the biennial section in the Argentine newsweekly *Somos* on October 21 (fig. 23). Under the headline “The Argentines at the Vanguard,” a color installation shot occupies two thirds of the page, this time in color, looking slightly down on the table but still exaggerating its length. Grippo stands at the far end of the table’s vanishing point, hardly more visible than the blurred biennial visitors looking at another CAYC work to his right. The text above him reads, “The Group of Thirteen won the Grand Prize of the Bienal. Winnings of 12,500 dollars. 35 countries and 210 artists participated. It is the first time that a non-European country has won such a high distinction. It was judged by an international jury. The prize ratifies the high level reached by Argentine art. Creativity was rewarded.”¹¹⁷ The image again reappears in the Brazilian newsmagazine *Manchete* on October 29, under the large headline “Frans Krajcberg: The Protest of the Sculptor” (fig. 24). The image of Grippo is the same size as, and positioned directly *above*, an image of the Brazilian sculptor Franz Krajcberg removing his work from the biennial.¹¹⁸ The foil here is clear: Grippo, barely in focus at the far end of a table of potatoes, decentralizes his authorship of a work that relies on the meanings embedded in ordinary objects. Krajcberg, below, insists on his authorial and interpretive control over a product of his own making, removing it from a context that did not support his prescribed meanings. Such images also have the effect of making Grippo appear to be the only artist exhibiting in the section; other Grupo CAYC artists do not appear in images of their works, such as Vicente Marotta’s wheat sacks on the cover of *Gente y la Actualidad* in November (fig. 25). Indeed, Grippo was the only member of CAYC present to accept the award, though he did not speak for the group except to

¹¹⁷ “Los Argentinos, a La Vanguardia.” Translation mine.

¹¹⁸ Filho, “Frans Krajcberg: O Protesto Do Escultor.” Translation mine.

express a certain perplexity amid the uproarious response, saying only, “We were not expecting such a prize. We do not work for the sake of being awarded.”¹¹⁹

According to Graciela Sarti, tensions surrounding the integrity of the jury built in the days leading up to the October 12 awards ceremony. *O Globo* reported complaints by the Polish-Brazilian sculptor Franz Krajcberg that two jurors, Marcia Tucker and Tomasso Trini, had made comments that Brazilian art could not be serious and that its entries were not “current.”¹²⁰ Ironically, the sole dissenting voice on the jury came from the Argentine, Silvia Ambrosini, who supported only Maler’s work but not the entire CAYC exhibition.¹²¹ When the jury announced it would award the Itamaraty Grand Prize to CAYC, Krajcberg, despite having won one of the Premios Bienal, promptly set about dismantling his work in protest. The following day, the Argentine newspaper *La Nación* reported,

The Brazilian artist Franz Krajcberg dismantled his work, threatening to burn it, while growling, ‘the decision is unfair to national artists.’ According to him, the jury awarded the Argentines so as not to get involved by granting an award to the group Etsedron, from Bahía, ‘that shows the cruelties of Brazilian misery, all around the world.’ The artist rejected his shared award of 20,000 cruzeiros (around 1,200 dollars), wishing the Brazilians to get it, but they refused his offer. The award granted to the Swiss Cherif Defraout, of about 500 dollars, came to a stand still when his manager disclosed his suspicions as regards the jury’s integrity. The event was filled with a sea of comments immediately after voting...one of them maintaining that ‘the whole of the modern trend in art denotes the presence of Communism’ and that ‘the Argentine flag will not be hoisted in the Biennale’s red pavilion.’¹²²

Indeed, the press coverage of the event, particularly in Brazilian media such as *Manchete*, revived debates about the ethical-political implications of what should be considered art.

Some more conservative critics echoed the objections to associating such art with “the

¹¹⁹ “Escandalo en la Bienal de San Pablo.”

¹²⁰ “Grupo argentino conquista o grande prêmio da bienal.”

¹²¹ Sarti, “Grupo CAyC.”

¹²² Pacheco, *Grippe*, 349.

Argentine flag.” The magazine *Eco de la semana*, skeptical of the atmosphere of “delirium” at the biennial, complained, “a sum of sausages, potatoes, sacks of wheat, rats and plastic lambs, in spite of all the international ribbons it harvests, does not amount to more than picturesque triviality, barely worth the momentary amusement of editors and readers of this magazine.”¹²³ The Brazilian editor Adolpho Bloch asked where in his company he could hang “as decoration potatoes, a hen and eggs, an ecumenical altar, birdcages, and I don’t know what other objects, bugs, and debris that won at the biennial.”¹²⁴ Such resistance belies commercial and anti-communist origins of the biennial. Krajcberg’s initial response, however, was precisely the opposite. To him, the award was an act of censorship, politically motivated in its efforts to reward only Latin American artists that aligned themselves with power in a country with a “friendly regime.”¹²⁵

Given the seemingly critical tone of *Signos en ecosistemas artificiales*, Krajcberg’s interpretation of CAYC’s exhibition as politically expedient for biennial officials and the jury is puzzling. In a later interview, Jacques Bedel and Alfredo Portillos rejected the allegation, saying, “CAYC is not a group of wealthy people, but a group of professionals who work honestly and with effort. The proof is that three artists were unable to travel [to São Paulo] for lack of means. Shipping cost a lot of money and was funded personally by Glusberg, who is not a tycoon but a critic who cares about promoting Latin American art through his own efforts. This is due to the fact that the Argentine entry was not officially supported.”¹²⁶ In fact, there was an official Argentine entry at the biennial, curated by Roberto Del Villano, which included work by Rafael

¹²³ “El delirio como una de las bellas artes.” Translation mine.

¹²⁴ “Frans Krajcberg, o protesto do escultor.” Translation mine.

¹²⁵ Fundación OSDE, *Arte de sistemas*, 82. (“Un país de régimen amigo.”)

¹²⁶ “A final, quem Krajcberg julga que é? Um Deus?”

Squirru, Bengt Oldenburg and Carlos Roselot Laspiur. That CAYC's exhibition attracted all of the attention indicates a nationalist excitement, evident in the triumphalist language of the *Somos* cover, about achieving recognition from international conferrers of cultural legitimation. Indeed, these magazines themselves took on the promotional tone of the *gacetillas*, further affirming CAYC's place at "the high level reached by Argentine art."

The nationalism that surfaces in Argentine coverage of the event may help to explain CAYC's presence at the São Paulo Bienal as a moment of official sanction. Photos document Glusberg touring the exhibition with the Governor of the state of São Paulo, Paulo Egydio Martins, under whose governance the journalist Vladimir Herzog was assassinated and student demonstrations at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo were violently repressed (fig. 26). And, contrary to Bedel's portrait of Glusberg the passionate critic and patron of Argentine art, I have already discussed how Glusberg's political connections made his participation – much less private financing – in the biennial incendiary among artists. If the controversies that surrounded Glusberg's management of CAYC smack of complicity with dictatorship, they also speak to the confusing negotiations and compromises those conditions required.¹²⁷ How could officials in power interpret works that speak to economic injustice, such as Marotta's sacks of wheat, or the silencing of people, such as Grippo's potatoes or González Mir's caged birds, as anything but directly critical of their regimes?

Perhaps most telling is a congratulatory telegram from General Jorge Rafael Videla, then president of Argentina and an architect of the torture and "disappearances"

¹²⁷ In a note to her essay in Fundación OSDE, *Arte de sistemas*, Mariana Marchesi touches on the "interesting and delicate issue... of the relationship between the businessman and the Argentine military government." If it's possible to make such a connection, she writes, it would have to be after 1977; the total disinterest of the Argentine government in the Biennial, symbolized by its refusal to lend the official flag of the consulate, is evidence of CAYC's lack of official status. Her explanation for CAYC's participation and award in the biennial revolves around "the new approaches on regionalism emerging in those years" (82).

of Argentine citizens that were, in 1977, at their height. The telegram offers “most hearty congratulations” on the prize, which “reiterates once more Argentine art’s high level and the rich variety of its diverse aesthetic proposals.”¹²⁸ It may have been sent before news of the Grand Prize reached Argentina, and certainly suggests that Videla never actually saw CAYC’s exhibition and its thinly-veiled references to state terror, though its irony reveals the complexities of meaning as they unfold in different ideological contexts.¹²⁹ An even more deeply ironic line from the telegram praises CAYC for its “search for new art forms of artistic expression consistent with the time in which we live.”¹³⁰ Indeed. If the *Signos en ecosistemas artificiales* exhibition was indicative of anything, it was the contingencies of context, the shifting structures of meaning according to “the time in which we live.”

Videla’s telegram reveals the extent to which international art politics had affirmed CAYC’s role in a global social order; as a result, the content of its exhibitions had little to do with their meaning. It is not that CAYC’s curatorial frameworks evolved toward tamer politics in later exhibitions, but that its mode of semiotic critique came to signify relevance to international art circuits rather than a pointed indictment of repressive governance. CAYC’s official recognition confirmed that its works would *not* be read as political, but simply as objects of increased exchange value, as placeholders for bourgeois fantasies, and as symbols of Argentina’s currency in global art movements like Conceptualism. Here, in a reversal of the social meanings produced by *Arte e ideología: CAYC al aire libre* and its provocation of police intervention, the congratulatory embrace of the very object of CAYC’s criticism reveals a different

¹²⁸ Quiles, “Arte de Sistemas.”

¹²⁹ Quoted in “Los Argentinos, a La Vanguardia.”

¹³⁰ Sarti, “Grupo CAyC.” This part of the note was reproduced in “Los argentinos, a la vanguardia.” It should be noted that *Somos*, the publication that ran the article, was known as a mouthpiece of the dictatorship and has since faced charges of printing false stories to cover up Videla’s crimes.

operation of the art work: signification as social practice. The official responses CAYC elicited – first threats from the police and then congratulations from the dictator – might be considered works of social practice and negotiation in themselves. Videla’s platitude that CAYC pioneered the “search for new art forms of artistic expression consistent with the time in which we live” seems a perfect encapsulation of the gaps in interpretation that led to such responses.

Glusberg’s role in exploiting these shifting contexts should not be underestimated. Like *Arte e ideología: CAYC al aire libre*, the exhibition at the São Paulo Bienal is a useful case study in context because it illustrates the ways in which interpretation – of formal strategies in addition to the politics of exhibition and reception – changes the meanings produced by the objects themselves. Conceptualism’s reliance on appropriated objects, as discussed here, affirm Derrida’s claim that “every sign...can be cited, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion.”¹³¹ It is not the intended message that makes Victor Grippo’s *Energía Vegetal* political (for example), but the open field of its interpretation. The Centro de Arte y Comunicación; Argentina in the 1970s; the São Paulo Bienal; Brazil in the 1970s; the realignment of art and state economies; recuperative efforts of activist-scholars; these are just a few of the contexts that (over)determine the ways in which a group such as CAYC can be incorporated into canonical narratives of Conceptualism. CAYC’s exhibition at the São Paulo Bienal is both an event in time, allowing for analysis of formal strategies and the politics of reception, as well as a locus for contested meanings in “infinitely new contexts.” Critical objects such as these do not necessarily aim to denote a political reality but rather to expose the conditions of their signification: this is their political act.

¹³¹ Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” 320.

Conclusion: New Topographies of Visibility

In April 1978, the Grupo CAYC returned to Brazil for an exhibition at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro. In a catalogue essay for the show, the Brazilian critic and curator Roberto Pontual wrote,

Different in the way of operating and even opposed to it in many of its objectives, the Center of Art and Communication (CAYC), created by Jorge Glusberg exactly ten years ago in Buenos Aires, has a lot of the interdisciplinary spirit of inquiry which characterized the Di Tella Institute, and follows in its footsteps, above all, in the will to remain open to newness, no matter whence it comes. In this sense, CAYC is internationalist, as were or continue to be Pettoruti, Fontana, the concrete artists, the kinetic artists, the neofigurative artists and the young militants at the Di Tella...Has the will to integrate themselves into international circulation hindered them, or is it hindering them now, from creating valid, significant, fertile works? I don't believe it, in any of the cases mentioned. If an internationalist posture is a fact of Argentine culture and art, it is convenient to deal with it not as curse but as a natural impulse, less as bondage than as a consciously assumed guideline.¹³²

Here, Pontual connects CAYC to Di Tella, to the legacies of the São Paulo Bienal, to Argentine artists of the past, to contemporary Brazilian artists, to the outward, internationalist gaze of Latin American art writ large. With CAYC, as with the others, an intense concern with the local always counterbalanced the "internationalist posture." The dialectical relationship between international and local contexts, which some scholars have conceptualized as a center/periphery relationship, entails a complex negotiation of codes; Glusberg's "systems" straddled this abyss, making use of the conceptual mode as a passport to global contemporary art. The diverse practices and output of 15 or so artists (not to mention the many that temporarily joined CAYC's ranks) over a period of a decade are not classifiable according to set rubrics of ideology, activism, or center/periphery. They enacted "the heterogeneous, even contradictory, gamut of

¹³² *CAYC Group at the Museum of Rio de Janeiro*, 17.

individual and collective practices that embraced the conceptual paradigm in this region” and elsewhere.¹³³ Those practices have continually contested the limits of categories such as “political art” and “ideological conceptualism” by remaining open to the discursive flux of historically-contingent meaning.

As I have sketched in the first chapter of this paper, the internal and external curatorial contexts in which CAYC artists produced and exhibited have reached out and searched for connections – genealogies that would situate CAYC practices among global narratives of conceptualism. At best, these genealogies propose alternative narratives of early conceptualism. Glusberg’s construction of CAYC as heir to Di Tella’s legacy, for example, grounds its conceptual practices in performance, political activism, and international pop sensibilities rather than minimalism. Thinking about conceptualism as a strategy for overcoming “the modern split between art and life” (as we did in chapter one) might be better served by considering the responses of international artists to the history of ideas and to the conditions of modernity rather than to a conceptual art movement located in a hegemonic center. Mari Carmen Ramírez’s inversion framework allows space for Latin American conceptual practices to be read as “guided by the internal dynamics and contradictions of the local context,” resulting in autonomous, and often inverted, interpretations of center-based Modernism.¹³⁴ At worst, these histories position Latin American counterpractices against a “mainstream” of center-based practices without allowing for complex articulations and exchanges across a highly heterogeneous region.

The historiographical frames that overdetermine political readings of Latin American conceptualism have thus done so in service of the center/periphery model. The

¹³³ Ramírez, “Blueprint Circuits,” 53.

¹³⁴ Ramírez, “Tactics for Thriving on Adversity,” 426.

narrative that a peripheral art world simply responds to the innovations of the center supports a Western, teleological mastery over radical practices and its corresponding market values. Even alternate unifying narratives, such as Ramírez's inversion framework, reinscribe peripheral difference in attempting to assign it positive value. But the neo-colonial gaze inherent in a center/periphery narrative cannot account for the ambiguities of a group such as CAYC: at once local and international, upstart and expert, critical and somehow representative of official culture. Whether they were intended to be read as veiled metaphors critiquing the underpinnings of authoritarian rule or not, Glusberg did not frame the works of CAYC as such; as I have argued throughout, they were primarily, tactically, insistently engaged with semiotic questions.

That these questions were, in fact, inherently political is an argument I have tried to stress in chapter two. While conceptual practices in Latin America did respond to local conditions, they did so with many of the same methods employed by artists in North America and Europe who, if they were not protesting authoritarian rule, nonetheless critiqued the institutions, communications structures, and politics of space that organized authority and inequality in their own localities. The production of all art – not just “peripheral” art – is embedded in the historical and cultural systems that locate it. If conceptual art of Latin America is bound to its political spirit, it is no different than the “pure” or “analytical” methods of North America and Europe. Any conceptualism can thus be read as political to the degree that it works toward unfixing the semiotics of power and authority.

My argument seeks to decentralize not only the production of conceptual art – to think about CAYC as contributing to, rather than applying, international practices – but also its analysis. In this arena Latin American art has occupied a heterotopia, as Ramírez has written, a “no-place in history.” Following Foucault, the historiographical

“elsewhere” of Latin American art has allowed for the privileged position of the “center,” West, or global North and the reproduction of a division of labor in which the North assumes the intellectual task of criticism and abstraction, while the South expresses narratives of true or immediate experience. The impulse to search for narrative in objects such as Grippo’s potatoes reveals, more than anything else, this organization of knowledge and its depoliticizing effects. Grasping for narrative (*what* they mean) limits the potential of the political gesture they share with conceptual projects across the “federation of provinces” (*how* they mean). CAYC’s activities and *gacetillas*, however, demonstrate a dialogic engagement in many directions – within Latin America, with Europe and the United States, with the “Third World” – that undermine its position in the historical periphery.

As a final piece of evidence I return to the *gacetilla* announcing the opening of *Arte e ideología: CAYC al aire libre* (see fig. 1). As I mentioned in chapter two, the *gacetilla* mailed to the Huntington Gallery is dated December 21, 1972; almost exactly three months after the opening (and closing) of the exhibition. Switching between future, present, and past tenses, the verbs in the announcement reveal the ambivalence of its function. The purpose of the *gacetilla* is not, of course, to announce a show about to open, but to announce that one has already occurred. Indeed, its arrival surely followed widespread press coverage of the closure of the show. Such a gesture can only have been meant to remind the receiving institution that it happened, and of the institution’s relationship with the subject of increased media attention. It demonstrates the ways in which “centralist” discourses of cultural legitimation, which may have been interested in the political ramifications of an exhibition of conceptual art in Buenos Aires in September 1973, have determined the very materiality of their objects of study. The

misdated *gacetillas*, the erratic methods of self-promotion, the interpretive instability of CAYC's art – these misrepresentations and miscommunications remind us that the archive itself is no more neutral or factual than the constructions of art history. They undermine the intransigence with which categories have “negotiated their place within and without the institution.” They work against the note scrawled across the top of many *gacetillas* at the Huntington Gallery: “File under ‘Argentina.’”

In an undated manuscript, Victor Grippo once wrote, “My aim is to curtail the contradiction between art and science by means of an aesthetic that arises from a thoroughgoing chemical reaction between logic-objectivity and subjective-analogy, between the analytic and the synthetic. I aim, at the same time, to valorize imagination (not fantasy) as an instrument of creative knowledge, one no less rigorous than the instrument provided by science.”¹³⁵ He proposes imagination (not fantasy) as a bridge over the abysses of disciplinarity, overdetermined interpretive frameworks, “standardisation of radical experiences.” In fact, the notion of imagination (not fantasy) might offer a more expansive methodological basis for resisting the social categorization required by dictatorship and for understanding the utopian implications of the construct of “Latin America.” Grippo's proposal suggests how the work of CAYC pushes the limits of these categories, always resisting and exceeding the historical processes of flattening, opening up space for new ways to think about unsettled questions.

¹³⁵ Pacheco, *Grippo*, 280.

Figures

Fig. 1. *Gacetillas* at the Benson Library.



Fig 2. Victor Grippo, A. Rossi, and Jorge Gamarra. *Construcción de un horno popular para hacer pan* (Construction of a Traditional Rural Oven for Making Bread), 1972.

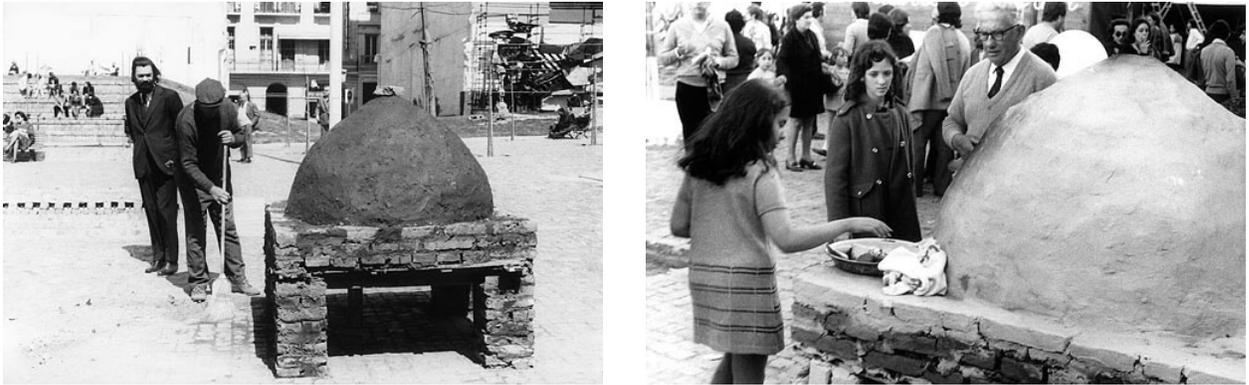


Fig. 3. Centro de Arte y Comunicación, 452 Viamonte Street, Buenos Aires. Building designed by Manteola Sanchez Gomez Santos, Solsona and Viñoly Architects.



Fig. 4. Interior of the Centro de Arte y Comunicación, 452 Viamonte Street, Buenos Aires. Ground floor, with Don Celender's *Corporate Art Movement* (1969) hanging in the exhibition 2.972.453. Fig. 5. lower level gallery space, connected to ground floor by spiral staircase.

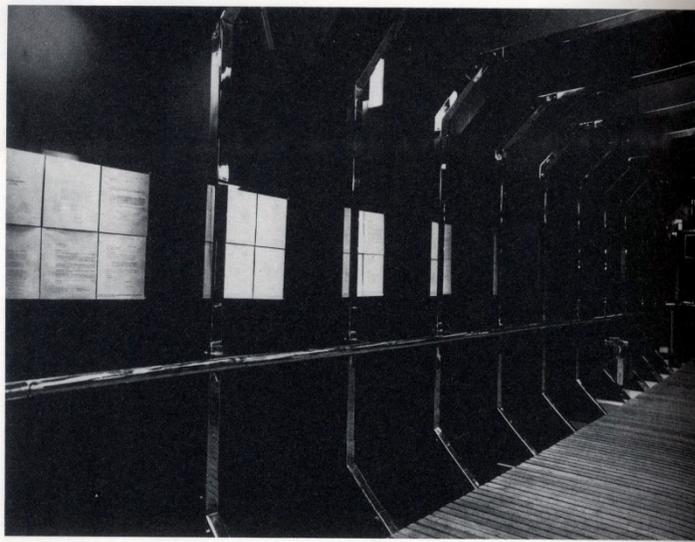


Fig. 6. Luis Fernando Benedit. *Laberinto invisible*, 1971. Installation view, *Arte de Sistemas*, Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires.

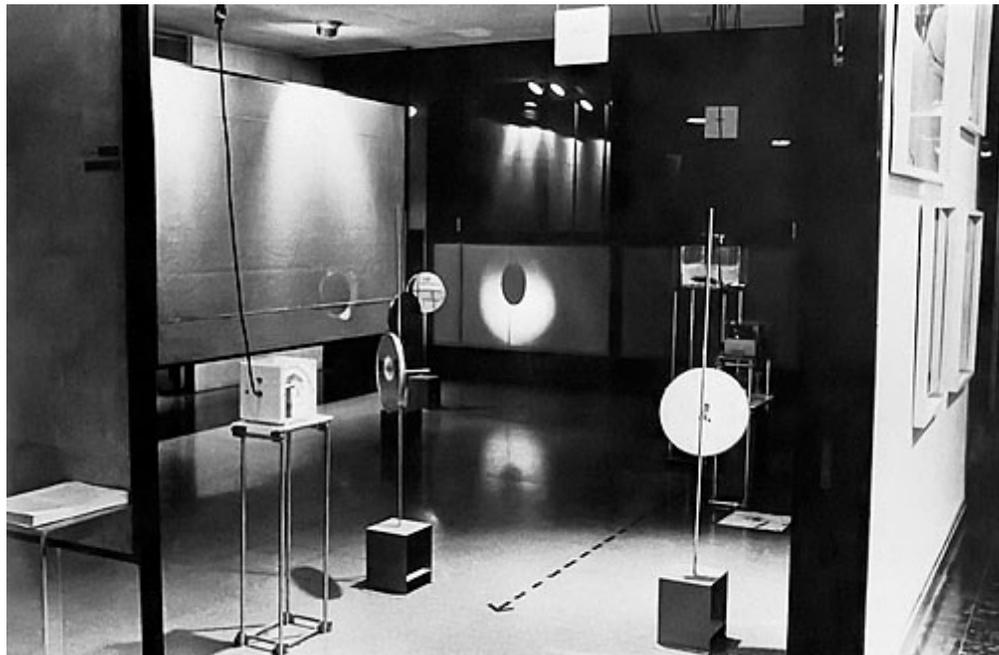


Fig. 7. Jorge de Luján Gutierrez, Luis Pazos and Héctor Puppo. *Fue raptado el Director del CAYC: J. Glusberg*, 1971.



Fig. 8. Victor Grippo. *Analogía I*, 1970-1971.



Fig. 9. The Grupo de los Trece, 1972. Seated: Alberto Pellegrino, Alfredo Portillos, Jorge Glusberg, Jacques Bedel, Victor Grippo, Julio Teich, Luis Fernando Benedit. Standing: Juan Carlos Romero, Luis Pazos, Gregorio Dujovny, Jorge Gonzalez Mir.



Fig. 10. Luis Pazos. *Transformaciones de masas en vivo*, 1973.

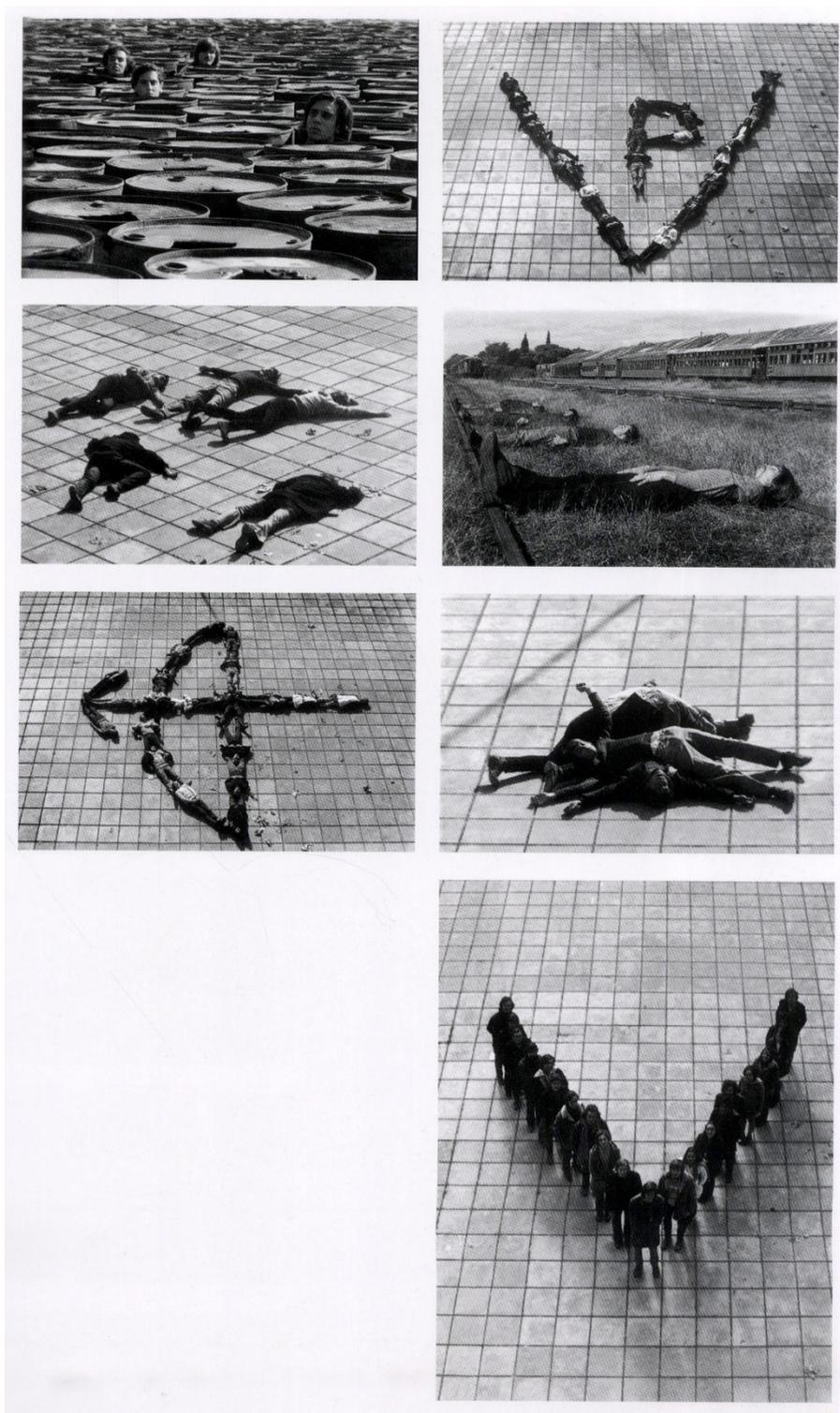


Fig. 11. *Arte e ideología: CAYC al aire libre (Art and Ideology: CAYC Outdoors)*. Plaza Roberto Arlt, Buenos Aires, September 23, 1972.



Fig. 12. Luis Pazos, Roberto Duarte Laferrière, Eduardo Leonetti, and Ricardo Roux. *La realidad subterránea*, 1972. Installation view, *Arte e ideología: CAYC al aire libre*.



Fig. 13. Horacio Zabala. *Trecientos metros de cinta negra para enlutar una plaza publica*, 1972. Installation view, *Arte e ideología: CAYC al aire libre*.

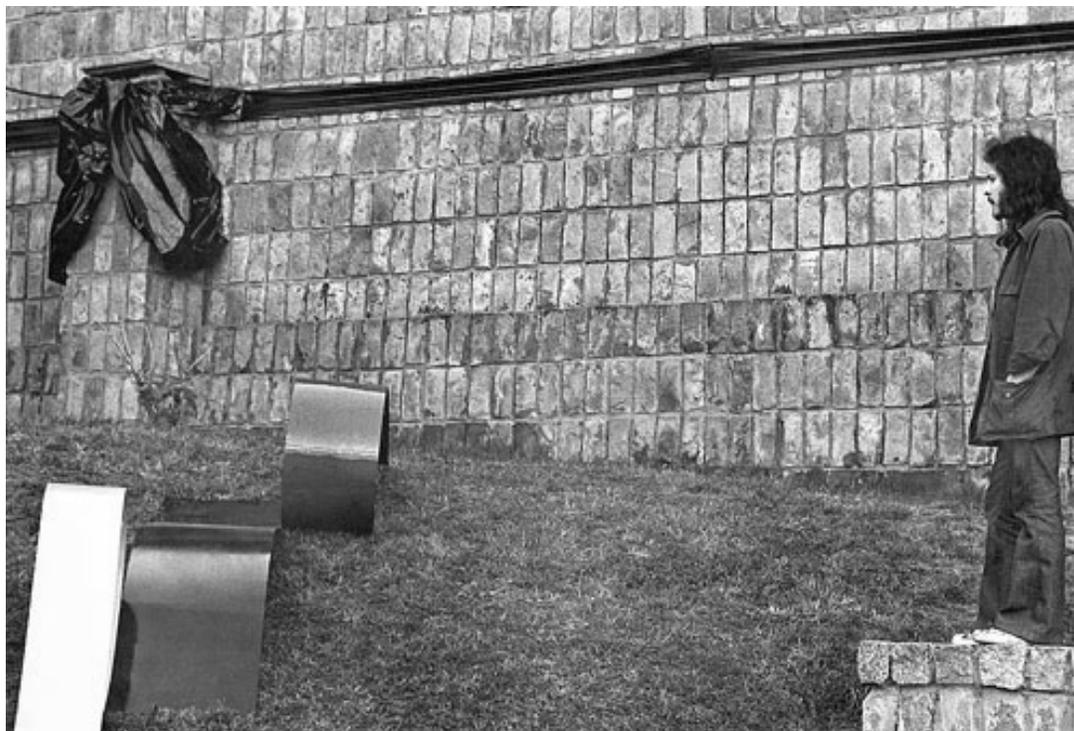


Fig. 14. *Signos en ecosistemas artificiales*. Installation view, São Paulo Bienal, 1977.

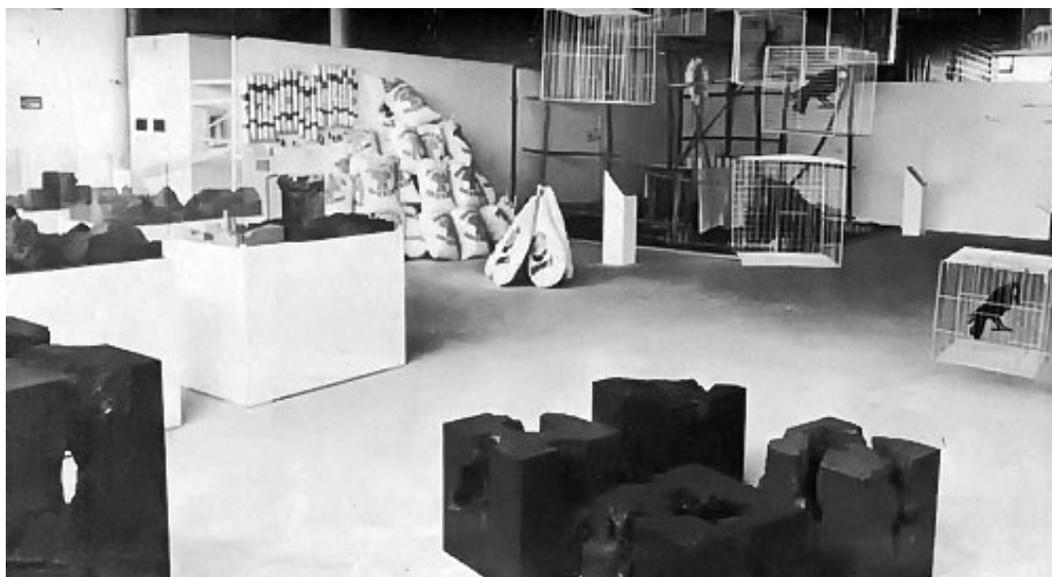


Fig. 15. Luis Fernando Benedit. *Proyecto huevos*, 1976/1977. Installation view, *Signos en ecosistemas artificiales*.



Fig. 16. Leopoldo Maler. *La Ultima Cena*, 1977. Installation view, *Signos en ecosistemas artificiales*.



Fig. 17. Vicente Marotta. Más y mejores alimentos para el mundo, 1977. Installation view, Signos en ecosistemas artificiales.



Fig. 18. Victor Grippo. Energía vegetal, 1977. Installation view, Signos en ecosistemas artificiales.

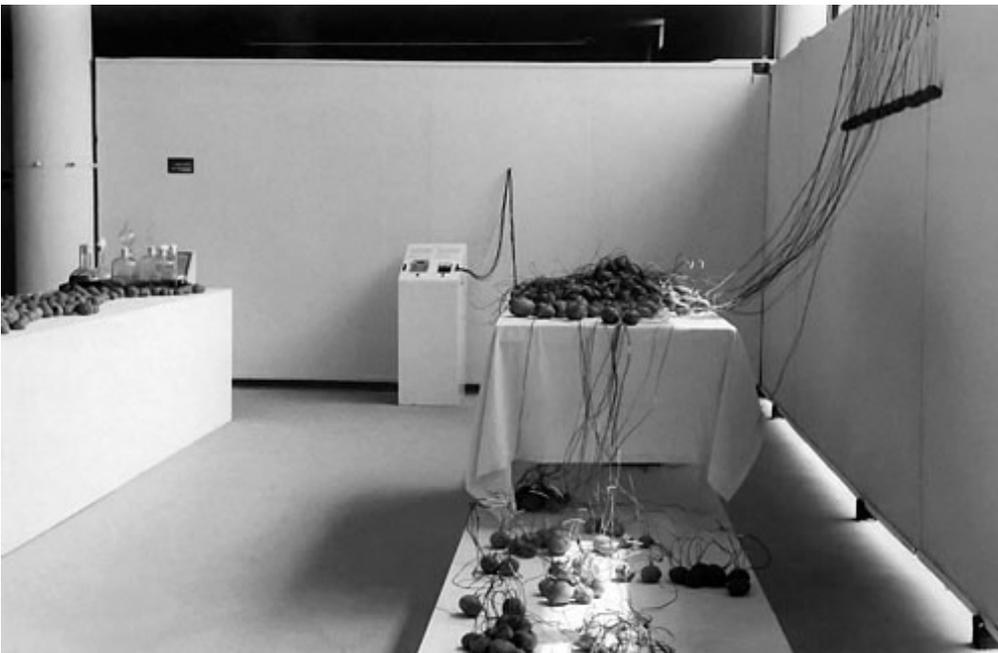


Fig. 21. *Somos* (Buenos Aires). “Los Argentinos, a la Vanguardia,” October 21, 1977.

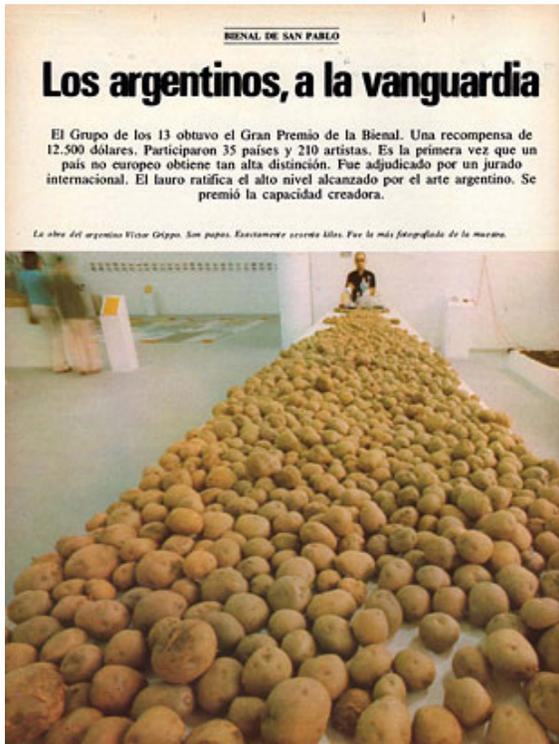


Fig. 22. *Manchete* (São Paulo). “Frans Krajcberg: The Protest of the Sculptor,” October 29, 1977.



Fig. 23. *Gente y la actualidad* (Buenos Aires). “Papas, pájaros y el Gran Premio,” November 10, 1977.



Fig. 24. Jorge Glusberg tours *Signos en ecosistemas artificiales* with Egydio Martins, Governor of the State of São Paulo, 1977.



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