

<b>VIVID[RADICAL]MEMORY</b>		<b>V[R]M</b>
Workshop Barcelona	Radical Conceptual Art revisited: A social and political perspective from the East and the South	

## **Other beginnings of the conceptualism (Argentine and Latin-American)**

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It is my intention with this paper to bring into discussion a tight synthesis concerning not only the starting points and notions that support my research about the beginning of Conceptualism in Argentina in the 60's and 70's, but also taking up again some contributions of the set of initiatives and investigations on the subject, that are advancing in different points of Latin America. Therefore, the intention of the text is to articulate in the manner of a tempting programmatic platform, a set of ideas, hypothesis and propositions which are expected to be productive or at least thought provoking in the collaborative and comparative work which this project hopes to generate.

First of all and although it may be redundant, our view is part of the efforts to question the hegemonic Anglo-American cannon of Conceptual Art, which limits its origin to the tautological or linguistic current, and its relevant names to artists located in the centre. <sup>1</sup>

In the last decade other accounts have started to be configured in connection to the beginnings of a non-centralised Conceptualism. . Undoubtedly, the curatorial approaches that Luis Camnitzer, Mari Carmen Ramírez and others have carried out from 1999, mainly from different museums and universities of the United States, helped

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<sup>1</sup> An exhibition as " L'art conceptuel: une perspective " in the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville of Paris, 1989, is a symptome of this work of reduction, which limits Benjamin Buchloh puts into evidence in a devastating series of critiques to the governing criteria of the show itself, by recognizing in a series of artists what he calls a " institutional critique ". **Benjamin Buchloh**, *Formalismo e historicidad*, Madrid, Akal, 2004.

strongly to shake and extend this canonical account. In this frame, there are clear gestures of inclusion<sup>2</sup> of certain areas of the Argentine and Brazilian avant-garde of the 60's in the new accounts of "global Conceptualism" as a heterogeneous and multicentre body. In parallel, with less international visibility and with a lower budget, in different points of Latin America efforts are maintained, until now isolated, to rescue from oblivion other cases that oblige to reconsider these inaugural accounts. I refer in particular to current investigations, as those being carried out for a number of years by the Peruvians Emilio Tarazona and Miguel López, on the origins of the Peruvian non-objectualism, which resulted recently in the exhibition "La persistencia de lo efímero", including environments, happenings and the Conceptual Art from 1965 to 1975, or the work by the Argentineans Fernando Davis and Maria de los Ángeles de Rueda, on the Conceptualism risen in the 60s in the city of La Plata (in particular the radical artistic "incentivating" project of Edgardo Antonio Vigo), or the review proposed by Soledad Novoa (among other Chilean investigators) on the development of experimentalism before the coup d'état of 1973, whose memory was blocked by the inaugural aspiration of the dictatorship of Pinochet, or projects as that of Álvaro Barrios on the origins of the Colombian Conceptual Art in 1968, that is taking form by means of publications and the curation of exhibitions.

Today it seems to be a propitious moment to bring up the possibility of articulating these breathtaking efforts, until now isolated although coincidental, in a researchers' network about the *other* beginnings of Conceptualism.

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<sup>2</sup> I refer precisely to a series of exhibitions and anthologies: **Alberro, Alexander and Stimson, Blake**, *Conceptual Art: a critical anthology*, Cambridge-London, MIT, 1999; **Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss**, *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, New York, Queens Museum of Art, 1999; **Mari Carmen Ramírez and others**, *Heterotopías. Medio siglo sin lugar: 1918-1968*, Catalogue, Madrid, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2000.

### **Off-center**

We need to recognise that Conceptualism includes projects, not only different but even opposed. Benjamín Buchloh sees in a certain area of Conceptualism the most complete attitude of assuming the consequences of the legacy of Marcel Duchamp, when he put in crisis the conditions of production and reception of Art. He says that we are in front of the biggest assault to the different dimensions of the artistic object as it was understood up to then: its visual aspects (as long as Conceptualism brings an elimination of visuality and a slip of the traditional definitions of representation), its commercial status and its distribution channels.<sup>3</sup> Coincidentally, in *Heterotopías*, Mari Carmen Ramírez refers to Conceptualism as a great leap of the 20th Century in relation to the understanding and the production of art (the second one after the revolution implied by the historical avant-gardes). "After declaring obsolete the status and the preciousness of the autonomous work of art, a Renaissance heritage, and after transferring the artistic practice of the aesthetics itself to the most flexible territory of the linguistics, Conceptualism paved the way for innovative and more radical forms of art".<sup>4</sup>

When Ramírez supports in this context the "precursor character"<sup>5</sup> of the Latin-American conceptualism, it points out that its difference stands in its eclectic, heterogeneous and contradictory forms, not subordinated to metropolitan canons.

The first moment of the Latin-American conceptualism would include, in accordance with its parameters, from 1966 until 1974, and would be restricted to Brazil, Argentina and the community of Latin-American artists established in New York.

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<sup>3</sup> **Buchloh**, mentioned work, p. 168.

<sup>4</sup> **Ramírez**, mentioned work, p. 373.

<sup>5</sup> **Ramírez** (mentioned work)

New investigations prove that this body of work deserves to be extended to other points of Latin America, as a specific example: the burst of Grupo Arte Nuevo in Lima in 1966. Undoubtedly, by the middle of this decade, there come together a series of dimensions that grant to this moment a density unknown at the time. But even well before this date, several attitudes related to Conceptualism can be encountered. As an example among Argentine artists, I would say: the *vivo ditto* of Alberto Greco realised from 1961 in Spain, Brazil and Argentina, the collective burning of the work of Marta Minujin in Paris in 1963 and her "recorridos" routes, environments, happenings and media works by the middle of the decade, and the projects of Visual Poetry and signings of Edgardo A. Vigo.<sup>6</sup>

The point is not just to notice the coincidence or not just to show the precocity or advance of a phenomenon that is born without a name. The recognition of the fact that the appearance of the Latin-American Conceptualism was simultaneous to that of the artistic central field forces to reconsider the link between centre and periphery, assuming parameters very different from those of irradiation or diffusion from the metropolis to the limits of artistic international trends. Although it is undeniable that earlier or later (in the 60's, with a surprising immediacy) the avant-garde emergent trends in the metropolis influenced Latin American artistic fields, artists and movements arose and reached a proper and singular development, among different conditions of production, circulation and reception of the works; the state of shaping subjects and structuring the field, of different relationships with the political and economic power. It can not be explained through the readings which understand Latin American Art in relationship to an international scene as being of late reception, submitted

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<sup>6</sup> This is also considered by **J. López Anaya**, "Conceptualismo en Argentina, 1961-1999", in *Lápiz* magazine, Year XIX, Nr. 158/159, Madrid, 1999.

and tarnished by the latest trends in art centres. Even one might say that any reading in terms of centre / periphery runs the risk of placing cutting edge productions -understood as backwards , poor, far away or exotic. The metaphor of "up-dating", which is so common nowadays, cannot explain these simultaneities either.

I believe that it is essential to create a history of links between artistic and non-artistic phenomena within the complexity of each specific situation, which does not imply falling into a relativist position, confined to emphasise the difference, thus obviating or undermining the differences between centre and periphery. It is also necessary to consider the existence of a common period, which exceeds the unidirectional circulation of information and produces works (and ideas) that flow in forms not subordinated to metropolitan canons, giving place to experimentation processes which are similar in different points of the globe. These hypotheses can help to explain the simultaneous beginnings of Conceptualism in - for example - Argentina, Yugoslavia and the United States. I propose to call these particular conditions of production and circulation *off-center*.<sup>7</sup>

#### The Argentinian case

An objection that can be made to the incorporations of the first Latin-American Conceptualism to the accounts of the global Conceptualism is that they run the risk of being reduced to a restricted and repeated set of cases,

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<sup>7</sup> With the *off-center* term I intend to refer to what is away of the center but also to a center that is not recognized as such, that is missed, disconcerted, which is out of its axis. **Raymond Williams**, in *Politics del Modernismo* (Buenos Aires, Manantial, 1997) calls to analyse the avant-gardes with their inconsistencies and distances, running away from the comfortable and today internationally adapted forms of their incorporation and naturalisation. This is: to observe the metropolis from one inside that it is out (the interior have-nots, the poor world that was always peripheral to the metropolitan systems). He concludes: "It is necessary to question a level: the metropolitan interpretation of their own processes as universal". The challenge (and the provocation) is based in reversing the usual flow (to track the effects of the center in the periphery) in order to think the opposite movement: that which has the same centre being it peripheral or of off-centre.

a list of known names and works (specifically: an area or a version "suitable to be shown in museums" of the production of Brazilian Lygia Clark<sup>8</sup> and Helium Oiticica, or the re-visited collective work "Tucumán Arde" in Argentina) which, having been extrapolated out of their local contexts, remain isolated as eccentricities deprived of their historical strength and their critical power. To avoid these risks, it is essential to consider each one of these productions or ideas as an exponent of the complexity of a stage that refuses to submit itself to homogenising accounts or reassuring classifications. These productions cannot be explained by themselves either, as autonomous works of art, rather they ask for their inscription in the radicalised cultural map of the period, as far as in these creative projects the traces of the political - cultural environments in which they participated, the networks of intellectual exchange that they generated, and the avant-garde legacies that they reactivated and updated- still remain. Therefore, we should ask what the artistic and non-artistic coordinates are that hasten these productions and ideas, which are so extreme in its radicalism?

The 60's kicked off on the continent with the inaugural burden of the victory of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, which allows foreseeing as possible and immediate, an expansive revolutionary wave on the continent. This horizon full of expectations intertwines, sometimes in a contradictory way, sometimes in a compatible way, with the innovative impulses that go through society.

The year of 1966 came into the history of Argentina by the burst of a new military coup headed by general Onganía, which demolished a fragile democratic regime, imposing an authoritarian one that combined the industrialist discourse, in the economy; the extension of the outlaw for all the opponent political parties, in politics; and a strong clerical and conservative

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<sup>8</sup> This limitation has been questioned by **Suely Rolnik** in her works on the therapeutic dimension of the relational objects of Lygia Clark. Among others "El cuerpo del arte contamina el museo", in *Brumaria* magazine, Nr. 8, Madrid, 2007.

direction, in culture and daily life. At the same time, the scene of contemporary art would turn out to be shaken by such a powerful creative effervescence, that made of 1966 a year to be considered by the Press as "the year of the avant-garde": Pop Art and happenings emerge in Buenos Aires and other cities in the country at the same time as Jacoby, Coast and Escari form the group Arte de los Medios de Comunicación de Masas- which together with *Tucumán Arde*-are today recognised as foundational milestones in the history of the global conceptualism.<sup>9</sup> The group intended to produce facts inside the circuit of the Mass Media, without any other materiality than the proper one of its media transmission, an idea of political radical scopes which is again regained in the communication design of *Tucumán Arde*. His first work-manifesto was the "Anti-happening": the construction of a nonexistent piece of news (the achievement of a happening), put into circulation through apocryphal "News in Brief", tricked photos, different complicities and so on. After a wide coverage in several printing press, the artists spread a denial. This circuit of trick-false piece of news-denial not only shows that the media obviously deceive, but points out an advanced idea at the time: the ability of the mass media to build up events. This is also a year when Ricardo Carreira settles his first conceptual approaches, as *Soga y texto* and *la Mancha de sangre*, which implies a crucial turn in the production of this particular artist and consequently the beginnings of the Argentinean Conceptualism. *Soga y texto* had a character out of place, surprisingly the originator of a new type of art. The work presented by the artist in the Awards "Ver y Estimar", consisted of three parts. The first one was a thread or a cord that

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9 In the anthology *Conceptual Art*, edited by **Alberro and Stimson** (mentioned work) central manifestos of both experiences are translated. They are also included in the already mentioned shows "Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950s-1980s " (Queens Museum of Art, New York, 1999) and " Heterotopías. Medio siglo sin-lugar: 1918-1968 " (Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid, 2000-2001), two of the first international exhibitions that take again *Tucumán Arde* in the last years.

was crossing the whole room of the Museum of Modern Art. It was hanging very tight, at the level of the audience, dividing the room into two, thus affecting the functionality of the space itself, changing the perception of the other exhibited works and blocking the way of the public.

The second part of the work was located in the delimited space that the organisers had allocated to the artist. There, a fragment of the same material was shown, rolled up on a small trestle of wood.

The third part was located in another floor of the exhibition and consisted of some photocopies, where you could see the negative image of the thread (or cord), and around it, a spread text: some letters, words and phrases.

A key to tackle the work is just the notion of *discontinuity*, which is clear in the arrangement of the work, divided in three areas, which only come together in the perception of the viewer who connects them. It is one of the essential items of the conversations that Carreira keeps at this time with the theoretician Oscar Masotta, closely linked to the Grupo de Arte de los Medios.<sup>10</sup> For Masotta, the discontinuity in time and space is typical of the avant-garde work, that wants to revolutionise the language, expand the notion of the work, and affect the behavior of the viewer, thus, modifying or changing his/her conscience or parameters of perception.<sup>11</sup>

The emerging of *Soga y texto* causes the burst of the traditional notion of artwork, as far as it breaks not only with the materials and the artistic genres, but also with the ideas of unit and composition, when he chooses a discontinuous means of exhibition, goes beyond any form of representation and avoids being included in any artistic genre. "This is material, it is a thread; it is

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10 About the contribution of Masotta to understand the avant-garde, see **Oscar Masotta**, *Revolución en el arte*, Buenos Aires, Edhasa, 2004.

11 Masotta takes again the category of the "discontinuous" of Roland Barthes, specifically referred to the book *Mobile*, by the French author Michel Butor, and to the debate concerning its publication. See **Roland Barthes**, "Literatura y discontinuidad", in *Ensayos críticos* (1st ed. in French, 1964).

here and limits a space. It breaks up with everything: it is neither a sculpture, nor a painting, nor a photograph. It is nothing at all", Roberto Jacoby points out. Its repercussion affects deeply not only the production means, but also the exhibition and reception means up to then known in the artistic field.

It is noticeable the way *Soga y texto* comes significantly closer to *Una y tres sillas* (1965) of the North American conceptualist Joseph Kosuth, which was not known in Buenos Aires at the time.<sup>12</sup> But, in contrast to the arrangement of the work chosen by Kosuth, which favours an attitude of conventional contemplation in the viewer, the arrangement of the cord by Carreira, just crossing the room, disturbs the perception of the other works, of the set of works, and obstructs the movements of the public. The artist does not limit himself to the narrow limits of the space allocated to each exhibitor in the Award; he goes beyond them and scatters the work, he splits it. When the thread unfolds, it becomes a border, a division of the space. When it folds over, it becomes a line. When it becomes a photocopy, it becomes a trace. These uses or placing of the material is what transforms it in something strange. Or, if we use the precise concept proposed by Carreira, *deshabituado*.

The notion of *deshabituado* goes further than an aesthetic key. It points at a social theory and implies a position in the world, a way of life, a commitment for changing it: "everytime we come across something new, , we become aware of causal or formal relations previously hidden or a simple not justified alteration is provoked , a *deshabituación* is produced".<sup>13</sup>

Carreira attributes to the *deshabituado* the ability (politic) of the artistic avant-garde to act on the

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12 Buchloh questions the datati3n of the "Proto-Investigations" of Kosuth, which its author dates between 1965-66, giving them a later date (February, 1967). See: **Benjamin Buchloh**, mentioned work., pp. 181-182.

13 **Ricardo Carreira**, " La *deshabituaci3n*", unpublished manuscript, no date, File RC.

'The term *deshabituado* has been left in the translation as the original as it is a term coined by Carreira.

existing facts and transform the audience and their environment. The artist Juan Pablo Renzi, one of the most active members of Grupo de Vanguardia de Rosario, also understands it in this way: "The vanguardism as an attitude is independent from the results: change, innovation, the renewal of the means, of the forms. The basic idea: the search for the odd, the unusual, the *deshabituado*. Art as a way of knowledge allows us to see in a deeper way reality and the avant-garde works give us a new vision of the everyday..."<sup>14</sup>

In the same sense - as Fernando Davis will later on explain in this workshop-, the Platense artist Edgardo Antonio Vigo unfolds an aesthetic *stimulating* programme that attacks systematically the integrity of the value of "Art ", it destabilises the traditional roles of the artist and the public, and postulates interchanges out of the institutionalised spaces. "A limited attitude, a radical option", Davis says: the unsteady creases and the trademarks against the adrift meanings of an aesthetic experience "for and/or to be shaped". In the same way as Carreira works on the " *deshabituacion* " , the project of Vigo proposes itself "to spur": " to disturb the natural order, to introduce a detour in the ordinary perception, to mess up the daily adaptation to established practices and norms. The description as "unmaker of objects ", that Vigo adopts for himself (...) agrees on pointing out the bet limit of the spurring practice"<sup>15</sup>

What other categories or concepts did the Latin Americans artists or theoreticians propose when considering what they were provoking in Art?

Thinking about the scopes of the dissolution of the artistic object itself, Masotta takes up again the concept of "dematerialisati3n" of the Russian constructivist El Lissitsky<sup>16</sup>, when referring to contemporary art processes

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14 **Juan Pablo Renzi**, *s/t*, magazine *Artinf*, Buenos Aires, 1981. The underlined is mine.

15 **Fernando Davis**, " Edgardo Antonio Vigo y las poéticas de la 'revulsión' ", in: *Arte Nuevo en La Plata 1960-1976*, Buenos Aires, Centro Cultural Recoleta, 2007.

16 Lissitsky was raising in 1927 that the expressive capacity of the book is multiform and that " the desmaterializaci3n is the feature of

and communication, the decreasing emphasis in its materiality.

To characterise the same process, the Peruvian critic Juan Acha proposed in the 70's the category of "non-objectualisms", which "responds to the imperative of transforming art - not only painting - or, questioning, subverting and replacing the fundamental ideas about art that the West has spread around the world". Emilio Tarazona and Miguel López will probably mentioned the potentialities and implications of this proposal on their papers

The fact is that we have a list of categories (desmaterialisation, non-objectualism, to undo objects) that, each one with different tones, demonstrate the need to generate a new theoretical language to enlighten the vertiginous explosion of the artistic traditional form that tackled these movements.

### **The blood spot: the politization of the conceptual approach**

The strong impact of Vietnam war on the radicalisation of the intellectual Argentine field was made clear when in between April and May 1966, at the Van Riel gallery in Buenos Aires what they called a "show-demonstration", covered all the walls (and part of the ground) with the contributions of 200 visual artists, of a wide range of artistic and political orientations that would otherwise hardly have met in another collective exhibition.

With what works did the avant-garde artists take part? León Ferrari brought *La civilización occidental y cristiana*, which was exhibited there for the first time, after having being censored one year before in the Institute Di Tella, the most visible institution among those who were supporting the experimentation.

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the period" , when the new communication techniques provoke the decrease of the physical matter and the increase of the " liberated energy " .

Roberto Jacoby made a set of sculptures producing press photographs to a natural scale: a Vietnamese mother carrying a died soldier as a Piety; an executed man on the point of collapsing, children crying, and other scenes of the tragedy of the Vietnam war.

"The most powerful of the two hundred exhibited works" in the Homage to Vietnam, according to the memory of Ferrari, "was *Mancha de sangre* by Ricardo Carreira". It was a solid puddle, made of red polyester resin, placed on the ground of the room. Carreira did not limit himself to show it there: the press informs that *Mancha de sangre* was "exhibited simultaneously in the slaughterhouses and in a Buenos Aires gallery ".<sup>17</sup> Easily carried and set up, *Mancha de sangre* manage to give the specific atmosphere to any place (whether it was a place for artistic exhibitions or not) and to allude to different forms of violence in accordance with the precise context where it was. Just as the notion of *discontinuity*, the capacity of the artistic media for creating atmospheric spaces/environments is another idea that Masotta develops when thinking about the adrift of contemporary art. It takes again the motto of the Canadian Marshall McLuhan ("the media creates the environment") to suggest that different media constitute different messages, and to advance from there in a relinquish of the visual condition of the work. "To a lower visual orientation, the greater involvement, the larger ambience of the media".<sup>18</sup>

If the tautological trap in which the so-called linguistic conceptualism fell down, could be a risk in case of continuing in the line of *Soga y texto*, with *Mancha de sangre* Carreira advanced in the politisation of the conceptual approach and in the precise articulation between concept and context.

This adrift was generalised to the whole Argentine avant-garde, which throughout 1968 carries out a vertiginous process of anti-institutional break-ups, shown in a

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<sup>17</sup> *Analysis*, magazine, Nr. 543, August 10th 1971.

<sup>18</sup> V. Oscar Masotta, mentioned work.

series of actions and clear positioning that we call "the 68' itinerary" This itinerary - to which one of its protagonists will refer in her intervention, Rosario artist Graciela Carnevale - culminates in Tucumán Arde, the renowned collective action that shows - among other questions - the way of the anti-institutional course to the articulation of the artistic avant-garde with the combative labor movement, performing it at the bosom of the labour party opponent to the dictatorship.<sup>19</sup>

### **Conceptual?**

On having checked these experiences, at the time of including and defining a set of practices historically placed, it is convenient to avoid assuming passively the metropolitan denomination of "Conceptualism", even more when the artists who were involved were very quickly and emphatically reluctant to take on this assimilation..

I refer precisely to some positioning immediately after the end of Tucumán Arde and the itinerary of '68, when the proper producers indicated some limitations of the experience of that year, they proposed new forms of cultural share (and put them into practice). In this point, they reacted very soon against what they were perceiving as a counteract or an appropriation by the artistic institutions: the understanding of *Tucumán Arde* as a declaration of Conceptual Art.

Between them, Juan Pablo Renzi realized in 1971 a series of pamphlets (numbering Tucumán Arde as Pamphlet Number 1), by means of which it introduced these critiques in diverse international calls. He presented Pamphlet Number 2 in the show "De la Figuración al Arte de Sistemas" in The Camden Arts Centre of London, and Number 3 in the show "Art Systems" in Buenos Aires, both, instances of the launching of Argentine Conceptual Art in the first years of the 70's, promoted by Jorge Glusberg. The latter pamphlet, under the title "New Fashion", shows the tension between taking part in an exhibition but doing it hosting

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19 V. Ana Longoni And Mariano Mestman, *From Di Tella to Tucumán Arde*, Buenos Aires, El Cielo por Asalto, 2000.

an extreme critique to produce inside the institution. On rejecting explicitly to be considered a starter of Conceptual Art, Renzi claims the politics of the achievements of the group and its function of anti-system. I will quote it broadly:

"Now what is fashionable is Conceptual Art (to renew the stock periodically in order to encourage the selling of goods – that, among other things, is always the same – it is one of the systems that characterize the bourgeois culture), and it turns out that I am (at least for some critics like Lucy Lippard and Jorge Glusberg) one of the people responsible for starting this phenomenon (together with my partners of the ex-groups of revolutionary artists of Rosario and Buenos Aires in 67-68.)

This affirmation is erroneous. And it is also erroneous any intention of linking us to the above mentioned aesthetic speculation. (...) I give you below the reasons that differentiate us:

ABOUT OUR MESSAGES:

1. We are not interested in considering them aesthetic.
2. We structure them according to its contents.
3. They are always political and they are not always distributed through official channels like this one.
4. We are not interested in them as artworks, but as a way to condemn exploitation. "20

In the same way, León Ferrari writes an evaluation of Tucumán Arde in 1973 21, where he points out that "his intention was to make art a revolutionary tool, to use art to do politics, to take part with his profession in the process of liberating our country" and he regrets that the work has been used as a platform for launching Conceptual Art.

In front of this explicit resistance to being catalogued within Conceptual Art, the fact is that we cannot avoid

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20 Juan Pablo Renzi, " Pamphlet Nr. 3, La nueva moda", 1971.

21 Response to a questionnaire of the Escuela de Letras de la Universidad de La Habana, unpublished, 1973.

wondering if we should name as such the productions that were previous to that international denomination, and that even were reluctant to its early incorporation.

### **Ideological Conceptualism?**

Thirty five years ago, Simón Marchán Fiz - in his classic book **Del arte objetual al arte del concepto**<sup>22</sup> included the Latin Americans within the trend that he names "Ideological Conceptualism": "With an extended conception of Conceptualism, the Argentine creators did not renounce the materiality of the work, nor to its meaning, nor to its contents". Their work, he says, aims to "analyse the limits or borders of the artistic languages as well as to define the ' institution - art in connection to ideology and politics ".<sup>23</sup> The most recent book by Peter Osborne under the title **Arte Conceptual**<sup>24</sup> reproduces a selection of images of the Latin-American Conceptualism in the section "Politics and ideology", defining it again in the following terms: "Ideological Content ' is the key term of the Latin-American Conceptual Art ".

Within the common place of attributing an ideological dimension to the early Latin-American Conceptualism, the question that arises is: what kind of effect produces this categorisation? Does it indicate its peculiarity or its difference with regard to other conceptualism? Undoubtedly, between the specific features that distinguish it, it is necessary to indicate, as we have briefly seen, its open and radical political condition (that is not restricted to a mere question of contents), as well as its break up with the space of institutional exhibition and the attempts of registering in mass communication circuits, trying to generate conditions of collective reception that exceed extensively the elite audience, common to the artistic circuit.

In contrast to the Anglo-American Conceptualism, which directed its critique to the artistic institutionalized

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<sup>22</sup> Simón Marchán Fiz, *Del arte objetual al arte del concepto*, Madrid, Akal, 1973.

<sup>23</sup> Marchán Fiz, mentioned work, p. 83.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Osborne, *Conceptual Art*, London, Phaidon, 2002.

world, the Latin Americans " did of the public sphere their preferential target "25 and they did not stick to the limits of the modern notion of autonomous art.

The first Latin-American Conceptualism is not only an artistic trend as a way of acting from the art that undresses (and undermines) the division between art and life. To a great extent, its identity and its artistic-political programme of intervention associates the ideas-strength *avant-garde* and *revolution*.26

These artistic movements were not claiming a place in the world of Art or the recognition of its peripheral existence, but something more audacious and critical: they wanted to question the state of the Art, exceeding it. It is the state of the institutionalised and conventionalised relation between art and politics that is here questioned, not necessarily raised in terms of "ideological contents". It is brought into discussion the place attributed to Art in the collective dynamics of the transformation of the existence.

In this sense, Conceptualism (not only the Latin-American) does not admit to be read as a new style or movement, of all those that take place in the art of the postwar period, and the following ones, but as "a strategy of anti-speeches" against the fetishism of the autonomous art and the systems of production and circulation of the work of art in late Capitalism. A deployment of its capacity of self-reflection, the proper practice imagined as "a way of thinking" - in accordance with the apt expression of Roberto Jacoby - the relation of the art with the society, of expanding the thought and of generating new forms of life. It is one of the most radical artistic experiments that tends to dissolve itself at the same time of

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25 Ramírez, mentioned work, p. 373-6.

26 See Soledad Novoa, "The local context as a problem for a reflection on *avantgarde* / *postavantgarde*", in: Pablo Oyarzún, Nelly Richard and Claudia Zaldivar, *Arte y política*, Santiago de Chile, Arcis, 2005, pp. 75-82, and my doctoral unpublished dissertation "Vanguardia y revolución. Ideas y prácticas artístico-políticas en el arte argentino de los 60/70", Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2004.

appropriating of territories up till then foreign to Art. To go through it as an unsteady territory of vague borders will help us to avoid stereotyped versions or reassuring categories.

At the same time in order to avoid any fossilisation of those intensities, it is essential to think about the reverberations and contemporary implications of the program that these artists are carrying out or proposing. What consequences does their legacy bring to our present? Into what was that *deshabituadora* and disordering power converted? Our difficult but exciting task is to make visible these turbulent practices, disarranged, still polemic and problematic, without its sense being closed or encapsulated. All this compels us to advance in a rigorous investigation. It is urgent to discover and re-discover the episodes, the achievements and the projects, the discussions and the ideas, the critical substratum of this silenced, lost or trivialised history.

This text correspond to the presentation that took place at the Barcelona Workshop in May, 2007.

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