ARTMARGINS

ARTISTS' NETWORKS IN LATIN AMERICA AND EASTERN EUROPE

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KLARA KEMP-WELCH AND CRISTINA FREIRE

Latin America and Eastern Europe have yielded an abundance of independent artists' initiatives since the 1950s. The dynamic marginal art scenes that developed under Latin American military dictatorships and in late socialist Eastern Europe were often characterized by their commitment to free cultural exchange and networking. To the extent that direct exchange was controlled from above, its significance, from below, increased in inverse proportion. From the peripheries of the Cold War, a marginal cultural intelligentsia sought creative ways to inhabit countercartographies and an alternative sense of belonging. If networking offered a model of collective action with clear appeal to left-leaning artists in Latin America, it also appealed to many Eastern "bloc" artists, if often for different reasons, despite the general erosion of the idea of the collective in the context of "actually existing socialism." In both cases, artists' investment in networking was an alternative to local forms of state and military repression that also sought to circumvent the triumphalism of the official Western account of artistic individualism and subjectivity. Networking of the sort that peaked in the 1970s was conceived of as a passage from the logic of identity to the logic of identification. In some cases, artists were able to meet and share their ideas directly. In others, carefully compiled lists of global addresses became the means for initiating dialogues and friendships, and finding out about developments abroad. Alternative

artistic proposals were circulated directly among producers through the postal system in vast quantities and across vast distances, albeit occasionally intercepted and confiscated by censors of various persuasions.

"Latin America" and "Eastern Europe" are, each in their own way, both historically dystopian and utopian cartographical projections that rhetorically unite countries with distinct political and cultural chronologies, bound together by shared experiences. Despite their distinct historical relationships to capitalism, communism, and colonialism, artists working in the countries united beneath the umbrella terms *Latin America* and *Eastern Europe* experienced similar degrees of marginalization from the North American and Western European art historical narratives that came to dominate histories of twentieth-century art—constructed in relation to the frameworks dictated by the Cold War. Recent research has revealed, however, that this politically motivated experience of marginalization, far from limiting dialogue, often had the opposite effect: left-leaning artists in Latin America and their disaffected anticommunist or reform-communist colleagues in the Soviet satellite countries exchanged artistic propositions and views that often flew in the face of the political binaries that hindered productive cultural exchanges between the so-called East and West in the official arena of the Cold War.

This special section is devoted to "networking" at the grassroots level, examining artists' complex motivations for engaging in ephemeral intermedial practices, local dialogues, and transnational networks. Latin American and Eastern European artists went to great lengths to escape the provincialism to which they had been consigned by history, geopolitics, and economics, by establishing contacts with like-minded artists at home and abroad. Networking tends to be classed as a strategy of subversion—a "tactic for thriving on adversity"—but we should be wary of constructing any artificially uniform, heroic narrative. One of the urgent tasks we face today, as a delayed audience of these artistic initiatives, is the need to foster a sense of the subtle differences at play in a range of contexts in diverse political situations. The traffic between Latin American and Eastern European artists in the Cold War period reveals that the territory of artistic practice served as a site for the development of common languages that scramble "top-down" approaches to history characterized by the rhetoric of cultural polarization. But there is little that is univocal about them, despite their shared commitment to artistic freedom, exchange, and dialogue. What is perhaps most extraordinary about the

experimental artists' networks of the 1960s and 1970s is the spectrum of political persuasions that the networks were able to embrace—from more or less fervent revolutionary communism, to reform communism, to anticommunism.

Nowadays, we increasingly view the development of an international art field as a fait accompli, sullied by the ambivalence of globalization. But it is worth pausing to reflect on how the emergence of an international artistic field is not solely a triumph of the "free market," but was also, in part, the product of the painstaking and often dangerous endeavors of many alternative artists over the course of several decades. A crucial shared characteristic of the alternative economies of cultural exchange that developed across Latin American and Eastern European experimental art scenes was their emergence and operation outside of any market structures. Paradoxically, from today's perspective, it may precisely have been the absence of a market framework that paved the way for artistic practice to become a powerful alternative zone of contact. As we continue to experience the exponential thirst, worldwide, for recuperating formerly invisible artistic practices, we do well to remember that a side effect of this enthusiasm has been the rapid commodification of Latin American and Eastern European art and archives since the 1990s. We have to continually negotiate the responsibility for the fact that this trend, which now appears increasingly irreversible, often runs counter to the historical aims of the artists themselves. Thus, if, in view of canonical history's tendency to include only those names recognized by the market already, we feel the need to continue to point outward to less well-known artists, absent from the "official narratives" of international, and, in some cases, also even local, art histories, we are complicit in feeding the eternal desire for the "new" in neoliberal societies. The potential ambivalence of our desire to reconstruct this alternative history, today, was brought into sharp focus by one of our contributors, who categorically refused to sign the copyright agreement required by the press for the publication of her text. For her, the idea of copyright is a stark negation of the ethos of free exchange that characterized the networks we seek to foreground in our section.

Andrzej Kostołowski and Jarosław Kozłowski's NET Manifesto, sent from Poznań in Poland to over 350 artists worldwide in 1972, is an early example of this new framework for artistic exchange, beyond the limitations imposed by political or economical restrictions. It proposed a map of connectedness that ran counter to official narratives of isolation,

drawing together artists in distant places within a system of artistic exchange that has been likened to Foucault's ideas of heterotopy.[1] In Kozłowski's words, the NET came together

> in semi-shadow, there were other artists at work, artists who were not interested in careers, commercial success, popularity or recognition: artists who devoted more attention to the issue of their own artistic, and therefore ethical, stance than to their position in the rankings, whether the ranking in question was based on the highest listing on the market, or the highest level of approval from the authorities. These artists professed other values, and other goals led them onward, they were focused on art, conceived as the realm of cognitive freedom and creative discourse.[2]

The artists' networks discussed in this section consisted of individuals who saw sharing their ideas as a key aspect of their work, and deployed the strategy of multiplication as an act of solidarity. Precarious periodicals, artists' books, postcards, stamps, and other low-tech reproductions circulated through the ever-expanding networks developed via a constant exchange of address lists, along with photographs, records of actions, visual poetry, and other experimental documents and proposals. So-called assembling magazines were another innovative form that proliferated thanks to the mail art network. These were publications organized by artist-editors or groups of artists, whose print run was determined by the number of participants who sent in their work—in a format and quantity previously arranged—in response to a letter of invitation. Many of these works, consisting of loose sheets in envelopes or plastic bags— clipped or spiral-bound—conveyed the precariousness of these types of production. Artists engaged in these networks soon found themselves accumulating substantial archives, which they soon began to share with friends, or, in those cases where this was possible, a wider audience.

One early example of an exhibition devoted to communication and the exchange of artistic information was Creación/Creation, organized

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1   See Luiza Nader, "Heterotopy: The NET and Galeria Akumulatory 2," in *Fluxus East: Fluxus Networks in Central Eastern Europe* (exhibition catalogue), ed. Petra Stegmann (Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2007), 111–25.

2   Jarosław Kozłowski, "Art between the Red and the Golden Frames," in *Curating with Light Luggage,* ed. Liam Gillick and Maria Lindt (Frankfurt: Revolver Books, 2005), 44.

by Julio Plaza at the University of Puerto Rico in Mayaguez in 1972. Plaza was to go on to collaborate with Walter Zanini, at the Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo, a public museum that became a lively enclave of freedom at a time when many North American and Western European museums were considered sites of economic and artistic elitism. As Director, Zanini collaborated with artists to turn the museum into a laboratory for participation. Its exhibitions/statements on contemporary art were seen as unique opportunities for animating, rather than escaping from, social reality, often under the most difficult circumstances. Mail art and visual poetry flourished in Brazil, with important contributions from Paulo Bruscky, Daniel Santiago, J. Medeiros, Falves Silva, Regina Silveira, Gabriel Borba, and Mario Ishikawa, among others.

Clemente Padín, from Uruguay, has operated in various guises on the threshold of art and activism for the past forty years in an effort to overcome canonical forms of artistic creation and circulation, and the limits imposed by the military dictatorships that devastated the Latin American continent in the years 1960–70. Among the collaborative magazines he edited and circulated were *Los Huevos del Plata* (1965–69), *OVUM 10* (1969–72) and *OVUM* (1973–76), *Participación* (1984–86), and *Correo del Sur* (2000). Padín's archive bears witness to a period in history marked by alarming events and violent clashes. Information about atrocities circulated in the mail art network throughout the 1970s: the forced exile of Chilean artist Guillermo Deisler, following Pinochet's coup d'état; the torture and imprisonment of the Uruguayans Jorge Caraballo and Clemente Padín; as well as the disappearance of Palomo Vigo, son of the Argentine artist Edgardo Antonio Vigo, to name just a few. The release of information about abuse committed by the military regimes in Latin American countries, conveyed through the mail network, caused strong public pressure and, in some cases, even the review of lawsuits against artists persecuted by the dictatorships. Key participants in the mail art network in Argentina were Edgardo Antonio Vigo, Horacio Zabala, Carlos Pazos, and Juan Carlos Romero. Graciela Gutierrez-Marx, who worked with Edgardo Antonio Vigo under the pseudonym G.E. MarxVigo, and whose personal testimony is included in this section, stands out as one of the few women participating in this alternative circuit.

Among those in the Eastern bloc to develop the strongest dialogue with Latin American artists was German Democratic Republic–based Robert Rehfeldt. Together with Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, he developed the idea

of "contact culture," and the pair became central figures in the global mail artists' network, thus overcoming the relative cultural isolation of the GDR in the late socialist period. Robert Rehfeldt's motto "Your ideas help my ideas," printed in the graphic pieces that circulated beyond the Cold War information blockade, became the principle powering his "art letters." Clemente Padín and Brazilian Paulo Bruscky were among those who sought to meet Rehfeldt when traveling to Europe. Carl Friedrich Klaus was also extremely active in the network, as was Klaus Groh, who headed an organization called the International Artists' Cooperation after 1969, and was author of the internationally distributed IAC-INFO bulletin. Working in Oldenburg, he soon developed extensive contacts across the Eastern bloc, and used his lists to author a number of pioneering publications bringing together for the first time the work of Eastern European experimental artists within the framework of the same book projects, many of whom had, until then, been largely unaware of one another's parallel activities.[3]

Political exile also frequently provided an impulse for alternative editorial projects. Paulina Varas's essay for this issue is devoted to Guillermo Deisler's unique contribution to Latin American and Eastern European mail art exchange. After leaving Chile, Deisler lived in exile in Bulgaria, before moving to the GDR. His editorial projects, particularly his magazine *UNI/vers*, are testimony of the role of graphic artists in the network. Visual poetry has also featured strongly in mail art exchanges since the 1960s, serving as a universal platform of sorts for forging connections that went beyond "translation" to explore deeper, subjective modes of solidarity that were often particularly precious for those artists living in exile. While living in Amsterdam in the 1970s, the Mexican Ulises Carrión created a personal and artistic enterprise, a mixture of gallery, archive, and editorial house, in order to disseminate artistic projects. Mexican artists Felipe Ehrenberg and Martha Hellion, exiled in England, created the Beau Geste Press, discussed in Zanna Gilbert's essay. Both Carrión and the Beau Geste Press developed lively exchanges with Eastern European artists. Through their efforts, and those of others, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom were among the many vital external staging

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3   His earliest publications, in particular, were central to the development of contacts among artists in Eastern Europe. See Klaus Groh, *If I Had a Mind . . . (ich stelle mir vor . . .) Concept-Art, Project-Art* (Cologne: DuMont Schauberg, 1971), and Klaus Groh, *Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa*—CSSR, *Jugoslawien, Polen, Rumänien, UdSSR, Ungarn* (Cologne: DuMont Schauberg, 1972).

posts for the relay of information internationally on behalf of artists in countries such as Czechoslovakia and Hungary, where forging direct links with one's neighbors was closely monitored by the secret police and censors.

An examination of the Hungarian and Czechoslovak issues of the magazine *Schmuck*, published by the Beau Geste Press, illustrates the diverse approaches to networking that characterized the Eastern European 1970s artistic scene. Milan Knížák, in Czechoslovakia, took advantage of the invitation to edit an issue of *Schmuck* to present, to an international audience, the activities of the experimental group Aktual, of which he had been a leading figure since its founding in the 1960s. The fact that Knížák did not opt for an overview of the contemporary Czechoslovak scene in 1974 may to some extent be symptomatic of an individualistic, locally oriented engagement with the network. But this in itself may also be symptomatic of the abnormality of the Czechoslovak art scene in the era of so-called normalization following the Warsaw Pact troops' invasion of Prague in 1968, and the intensive cultural repressions that followed, continuing throughout the 1970s.

An overview uniting the experimental scenes in the former Czechoslovakia would doubtless have included key figures such as Petr Štembera in Prague, Jiří Valoch and Jiří Kocman in Brno, and Alex Mlynárcik and Stano Filko, among others, in Bratislava, all of whom actively pursued international contacts and featured very prominently in the performance art, conceptual art, and concrete-poetry networks of the period. Paradoxically such artists tended to be better connected internationally than they were with their peers in other parts of Czechoslovakia. Even Jindřich Chalupecký, the Director of the important avant-garde Václav Špála gallery, which hosted a legendary Duchamp exhibition in 1969, was unable to make these sorts of links, although he played a unique role in fostering direct exchange between artists from the Soviet Union and their Czechoslovak colleagues as of the late 1970s, with the support of Maria Slavecka, whose marriage to Viktor Pivovarov enabled the Moscow conceptualist to become an exile in Czechoslovakia, putting pressure on the almost invisible chinks in the armor of pre-perestroika Soviet isolationism. This, in turn, paved the way for an, as yet little studied, Czechoslovak/USSR network that saw a number of key Moscow conceptualists visit and meet artists such as Valoch and Kocman for the first time, in the early 1980s.

László Beke and Dora Maurer, arguably the most important international networkers in 1960s and 1970s Hungary, meanwhile, responded to the Beau Geste Press's invitation to edit an issue of *Schmuck* by present-

ing an inclusive overview of the Hungarian unofficial art scene as a whole, inviting a wide range of artists, working in different ways, to contribute documentation of their work. The exercise was one that Beke repeated in 1974, on the invitation of Jorje Glusberg, director of the Buenos Aires–based Centro de Arte y Comunicación (CAYC), which hosted a major festival of Hungarian art, accompanied by a folder containing reproductions of the documentation displayed as part of the exhibition.[4]

Glusberg was a global networker of considerable means and traveled extensively in Eastern Europe in the early 1970s, developing contacts. In addition to the Hungarian Festival, his trips bore fruit in a little-documented Polish exhibition at CAYC. The Argentinean's visit to Poland made a marked impression on a generation of artists emerging in the 1970s, for whom the colorful CAYC bulletin, published and distributed in unprecedented quantities, particularly in view of the precariousness and small print run of most contemporary publications of its sort, was a precious source of information about artistic developments abroad. Among those in Warsaw to be graced by a visit from Glusberg was the self-taught artist and poet Andrzej Partum, who welcomed foreign visitors to what he called the Bureau de la Poésie, his narrow one-room apartment whose drab walls were covered with mailed poems and artistic propositions from all over the world. It was at Partum's that Glusberg met the artist duo KwieKulik, whose apartment, like Partum's, was a key meeting place for alternative art and its documentation from the 1970s onward. The Studio for Activities, Documentation and Propagation, as they called it (the PDDiU), played host to artists such as Jiří Kovanda and Petr Štembera from Prague, and Yugoslav artists Tomislav Gotovacand Goran Trbuljak, among others. Such meetings were lively and rare opportunities for artists who had hitherto met only through sharing the pages of international publications to exchange artistic thoughts and propositions in person. Poland undoubtedly served as a hub for Eastern European international exchanges throughout the late socialist period, and, by the late 1970s, the number of spaces that might be called, after the definition offered in the NET Manifesto, "points of the NET" became so numerous that we cannot do justice to all their activities here. György Galántai and Julia Klaniczay's apartment-based independent space Artpool in Budapest, founded in 1979, also remains a crucial point in the global net, and operates to this day as

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4   See Annamária Szöke and Miklós Peternák, "Tomorrow Is Evidence!" in *Subversive Practices: Art under Conditions of Political Repression*, ed. Hans D. Christ and Iris Dressler (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 121–79.

a living archive for experimental and mail art networks (discussed in Jasmina Tumbas's contribution to this section).

In addition to the Hungarian and Polish exhibitions, CAYC in Buenos Aires also hosted an exhibition of work by artists from Yugoslavia. Surprisingly, but perhaps symptomatically of the specificity of the Yugoslav context, Yugoslavia was represented in Argentina by officially sanctioned artists whose names, today, are less familiar than those of their experimental colleagues who went on to achieve considerable recognition in the international field after the collapse of Yugoslav "self-management." This anomalous episode is indicative of the powerful vicissitudes engendered by state intervention in international artists' networking, and signals the impossibility of establishing clear-cut distinctions between official and unofficial artistic spheres in some situations, as well as the bureaucratic obstacles foreigners often confronted, in the late socialist context, in seeking to navigate a variety of local scenes and establish contacts with marginalized groups. If Yugoslav socialism was characterized by a far greater degree of openness to the West than the Soviet-style socialism of the satellite countries, not to mention the Soviet Union, which was uniquely isolated until the 1980s, the state's successful performance of openness, and Yugoslav citizens' relative freedom to travel, did not translate into an open ticket for experimental artists to represent the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in an international arena. Ivana Bago's essay analyzes the peculiarities of Yugoslav experimental artists' predicament with reference to two artist-run initiatives: the Galerie des Locataires, founded in 1972 by Ida Biard in Paris, and Podroom–The Working Community of Artists, active in Zagreb in the period 1978–80.

Artists' networks of the 1960s and 1970s continue to inspire contemporary art workers today. As Zdenka Badovinac has observed, fighting back against Eastern Europe's historical "lack of self-confidence which at times borders on servility to the West" has entailed becoming "producers of our own knowledge."[5] For "local bodies of knowledge, including the genealogies of local avant-gardes" are "a precondition for establishing any planetary negotiations."[6] Seeking to redefine the aims of the contemporary art museum after the disintegration of Yugoslavia, Badovinac and Igor Zabel learned from "the experiences of artists and small non-institutional spaces that had, especially in the eighties in Slovenia, developed

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5   Zdenka Badovinac, "Contemporaneity as Points of Connection," *e-flux Journal* 11 (December 2009): 5–7.
6   Ibid., 5–7.

particular strategies for self-organization, alternative networking, and operating internationally, and that were significantly more successful at doing this than the official cultural policy was."[7] But while the artists' networks discussed in this issue represent powerful instances of cultural solidarity, we ought, perhaps, to be wary of claiming them as antecedents of today's Internet-based social networks, for the 1960s and 1970s idea of the "network" stands in marked opposition to the neoliberal idea of the network as a competitive tool in the technocratic environment: on the one hand, we have the globalization of the art market; on the other, the possibility of Internet-based activism. Arguably, we can trace the germination of this ambivalence in some of the practices discussed in this issue.

The special section in this issue of *ARTMargins* emerged from the editors' shared interest in artistic exchanges within Eastern European and Latin American art, and between the two. There are strong resonances between Cristina Freire's exhibition and museum-based research project Alternative Networks, on the one hand, and Klara Kemp-Welch's project *Networking the Bloc* on the other.[8] And *ARTMargins Online* has been a key site for forming links between national art histories within a translocal framework since its inception in 1999. Additionally, there are a number of international collaborative initiatives that rhyme strongly with the aims of this issue: the international archive-sharing project *Internationale*, and *Rede Conceitualismos do Sul*, an international network and thinking platform created by researchers involved with conceptualism in Latin America, and concerned about the current neutralization and obliteration of the political issues involved in the field. One of its concrete projects includes actions to secure public access to a series of important artists' archives in Latin America, including that of Clemente Padín, in Montevideo, at the Universidad de la Republica.[9] We also acknowledge a number of other pioneering research projects, including Vivid [Radical] Memory

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7   Ibid., 5–7.

8   Cristina Freire's Alternative Networks was one of a series of exhibitions curated at the Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo as partial results of the long-term research project Conceptual Art and Conceptualisms developed at the Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo since the mid-1990s. See also Cristina Freire, *Poeticas do processo. Arte conceitual no museu* [Poetics of the Process. Conceptual Art in the Museum] (São Paulo: Iluminuras, 1999); Cristina Freire, *Paulo Bruscky: Art Archive and Utopia* (Recife: CEPE, 2007); among others.

9   It is important to note Museo Reina Sofia's (Madrid) sustained support of *Rede Conceitualismos do Sul* initiatives. A recent alarming phenomenon has been the migration of such collections and archives, exiled and sold to museums and metropolitan collections.

(Barcelona), the exhibition Subversive Practices (Stuttgart), and Meeting Margins (United Kingdom), on whose initiatives we seek to build.[10]

Rather than defining a closed network, the testimonies and texts gathered here are intended as a means to expand the diversity of approaches to the networks pursued by artists in Latin America and Eastern Europe, proposing new methodologies. We highlight the need to continue this work, signaling past, present, and future fields of international exchange.

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10   Further information on these projects can be found online: Vivid [Radical] Memory, "Radical Conceptual Art Revisited: A Social and Political Perspective from the East and the South," accessed April 4, 2012, http://www.vividradicalmemory.org/htm/project/project.html; Subversive Practices, accessed May 14, 2012, http://www.wkv-stuttgart.de/en/programme/2009/exhibitions/subversive/; Meeting and Margins, accessed April 4, 2012, http://www.essex.ac.uk/arthistory/meeting_margins/Default.htm.

NET, JAROSŁAW KOZŁOWSKI
IN CONVERSATION WITH
KLARA KEMP-WELCH

KLARA KEMP-WELCH: I'd like to begin by asking you about the unique network of author's galleries in the Polish People's Republic in the 1960s. Could you tell me something about these spaces, in particular about your involvement with Andrzej Matuszewski's Galeria odNowa?[1]

KOZŁOWSKI: There was a very particular situation in Poland, in comparison to other countries in Central and Eastern Europe. A few galleries surfaced in the wake of the events of "October" 1956, such as Marian Bogusz's Krzywe Koło in Warsaw, and their values were shared by the galleries that appeared in the 1960s such as Galeria Foksal, Galeria Krzysztofory, Andrzej Matuszewski's Galeria odNowa, Jerzy Ludwiński's Galeria pod Moną Lizą, and Gerard Kwiatkowski's Galeria EL. There are different terms for these galleries—"authors' galleries" is one, or we can speak of independent, alternative, underground, or anti-institutional spaces—the point is that they functioned outside the official circuit. All the other exhibition spaces in Poland at that time were controlled by a

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[1]   Andrzej Matuszewski (b. Poznań, 1924, d. 2008): painter; sculptor; art theorist; author of environments and spectacles; cofounder of Grupa R-55 in 1955—a group devoted to reappropriating realism as a mode of opposition to Polish postimpressionist tendencies; director of Galeria odNOWA (1964–69)—a key space for young innovative artists in the Students' Club in Poznań devoted to challenging traditional definitions of artwork and to developing new exhibition practices; author of *Parallel Actions* after 1972; organizer of a groundbreaking series of artists' meetings in Pawłowice, Dłusko, and Jankowice (1975–78).

system appointed to do this, and realized programs that reflected cultural policy of that period, though this varied of course, and was different before October 1956 and different after October, changing with the flow of time, the arrival of Gierek, and so on. What mattered was the distinction between these entirely state-controlled networks with their official exhibition spaces, and those few (and there *were* still few in the 1960s) galleries that built their own program and identity and weren't in any way coordinated by the Ministry of Culture and Art or the Union of Artists, which was also under very strict control and realized the official program. Although the cultural program at that time was officially defined by Party institutions, and enforced through provincial and central committees, these galleries completely ignored this sort of obligation. They were led by either theorists, as in the case of the Foksal Gallery and Gallery Mona Lisa, or by artists realizing their own program, their own art utopia.

KKW: Did the people who ran these galleries belong to the Union of Polish Artists? I was under the impression that in the countries of the "bloc" it was impossible to function as an artist without being a member of this professional body?

JK: Membership in the Union wasn't the result of expressing a wish to join the Union; it was linked to completing one's studies at an art school. Anyone who completed an art degree at that time automatically became a member of the Union, but this had no bearing on the independent status of these galleries.

KKW: In practical terms, if the sole criterion was to have finished the academy, doesn't that mean that the Union was relatively open to different forms of art? Were there instances of people who were not accepted into the Union?

JK: Anyone who had a higher education art degree was accepted into the Union. This was the only key to membership. But membership in the Union had no bearing on anything. . . . Well, other than that, it did have a bearing on the possibility of exhibiting in official galleries or museums; it had a bearing on various existential aspects of an artist's life, such as the possibility of getting a studio, scholarships, undertaking commissioned work.

KKW: Were the authors' galleries *allowed* by the authorities, then? I ask because they did not exist in the same way in other countries in the Eastern bloc.

JK: They weren't prohibited. Above all, they functioned outside the frame of official art institutions. For example, Galeria Foksal's sponsor was the PSP, an institution concerned with commissioning and designing memorials, banners, and other official art forms.

KKW: And who sponsored Matuszewski's activities?

JK: The Union of Polish Students. Galeria odNowa was located beside the Student Club, and sponsored by the Union of Polish Students, who would also go on to sponsor Akumulatory 2 later in the 1970s. In Wrocław, it was the International Book and Press Club that sponsored the Mona Lisa Gallery. Galeria Krzysztofory in Cracow was sponsored by the Cracow Group of Artists.

KKW: At the time of your collaboration with Matuszewski in the second half of the 1960s, initially as an assistant in the gallery, your approach to art seems to have shifted dramatically. It was during that period that you first sent out anonymous instructions in the mail, among others an envelope containing grains of sand with instructions to the recipients to count them. Were you inspired by the structure of George Brecht's event scores? Could you tell me why the strategy of anonymity was important to you? Who did you send these instructions to?

JK: I still didn't know anything about Brecht at that time. There were five of these correspondence pieces that I mailed anonymously between 1968 and 1970. I was becoming more aware of what was happening in art—not just in Polish art—and I had had some important experiences at odNowa gallery, such as meeting Włodzimierz Borowski and Jerzy Ludwiński, and collaborating with Andrzej Matuszewski, which was important in different ways. The anonymity of the correspondence pieces came out of a desire to avoid authorship and not to construct an artistic identity or a name for myself—to escape attributing whatever exists in art to the signature. I sent around three hundred of each of these pieces. They were sent to people I knew and to people I didn't know, whose addresses I took from the phone book.

KKW: Not necessarily artists?

JK: Not necessarily artists. People selected completely by chance too, and of course there wasn't a return address. The postal service destroyed one of them because the name of some high-up politician happened to be among the addressees, which led them to be suspicious. To be on the

safe side, they destroyed the entire batch of correspondence, which I had carelessly sent from just one post office.

KKW: What were your five propositions?

JK: One of them involved counting grains of sand, the second was a piece of paper with instructions on how to fold the page into a paper airplane, and there was an instruction saying that after folding the piece of paper the receiver should sign their name and surname, open a window and fly it out. . . .

KKW: So the receiver is the one who realizes the proposition?

JK: The receiver becomes a participant, counting the grains and so on. . . .

KKW: Did the receiver also become an artist? Can everyone become an artist?

JK: Maybe it wasn't quite so conscious about turning everyone into an artist. But a participant, yes. Another proposition was a postcard with the name and surname of the person I was sending it to, with the caption "sphere of imagination."

KKW: Was this before your important "Imagination Zone" action in 1970?

JK: Yes, it was earlier. What else was there . . . there was half a photograph, each half sent to a different person, so if I sent it to Mr. X, there was information that the rest of the photograph, which wasn't there, was in the possession of Mr. Y, and Mr. Y's with Mr. Z, and in this way a huge circle was produced.

KKW: But you didn't include the address of where the other half was?

JK: No, no. Just the name.

KKW: Could you tell me more about odNowa Gallery?

JK: odNowa was far more important to me as an experience than the six years I spent at art school. Art schools were very conservative at that time—academic in the most repulsive sense of the word—following a compulsory program. They didn't provide any particular adventures intellectually. At odNowa though, thanks to Andrzej Matuszewski's program, I was able to get acquainted with other interesting artists who were rather marginal at that time. That is to say—they didn't take part in official trends, just in the network of alternative galleries that were functioning at the

time. I already mentioned Borowski, Ludwiński, but also Rosołowicz, Chwałczyk, Fijałkowski, and many others.

KKW: Was odNowa a discursive environment or mainly an exhibition space?

JK: Mainly an exhibition space, but also, from time to time there were lectures, discussions.

KKW: Were there also international artists?

JK: Not many, because of the political restrictions the movement of international artists was made very difficult. But there were a few artists from abroad.

KKW: odNowa was closed in 1969, is that right? Was this partly due to the changes in cultural politics after the events of March 1968?

JK: Yes. Its closure was connected to two events that took place there. The exhibition and performance by Włodzimierz Borowski, VIII Syncretic Show, which happened shortly before March 1968, was attacked by an art critic in a Poznań newspaper, the organ of the Party Regional Committee. The other was Andrzej Matuszewski's provocative happening titled Proceeding. The closure of odNowa Gallery had to do with the radical-ism of these two actions which decidedly went beyond what was con-sidered appropriate at the time.

KKW: What changes did the shift from the politics of Gomułka to the politics of Gierek bring, after 1970? Andrzej Turowski and Piotr Piotrowski have both argued, in different ways, that Gierek began to play a new game in the 1970s, outwardly allowing *more* freedom, but at the same time creating what Turowski, following Foucault, has called "ghettos" or "enclaves." To what degree do you think it's possible to characterize the change in this way? Would you agree that this was Gierek's cultural game? Did the situation improve for artists?

JK: It didn't for me, just the opposite. At the beginning of the Gierek period I had all the problems with NET. It began with a denunciation, and then the security services invaded my apartment and seized all the mate-rials and so on. But it is true that some time in the mid-1970s the activi-ties of unofficial galleries were neutralized by their rapid multiplication across the whole country. This meant that enclaves of official avant-garde art were created [by the authorities], or rather fabricated. These were

then sponsored—generously sponsored—and these sorts of initiatives were designed to neutralize and marginalize unofficial galleries and their activities.

KKW: It's interesting that there was a proliferation of new galleries and a shift in policy in the mid 1970s. 1975, after all, saw the setting in motion of the Helsinki process, according to which the communist authorities agreed in an international forum, in writing, to respect basic human rights, such as the right to freedom of intellectual exchange. It was on the back of these commitments that dissidents in Czechoslovakia were then able to demand that the authorities begin to respect the rights for which they had signed up.

Returning to 1968, though, and the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact troops in August: repression intensified across the board, particularly in Czechoslovakia, with the onset of so-called normalization. To what extent did artists in Poland feel a sense of duty toward their neighbors in the Eastern bloc? Was there a feeling that one should try to give them a hand to make some exhibitions possible, to try to help them make international contacts? There were a number of experimental Czechoslovak artists who visited Poland in the 1970s, for example, but as far as I'm aware, there wasn't any significant evidence of artistic solidarity in the short term, post-1968? The shock does not seem to have been registered in Polish unofficial art of the period, in contrast to a series of actions in the Hungarian art scene designed to show solidarity with Czechoslovakia. How was this invasion of Czechoslovakia processed in artistic circles in Poland?

JK: The invasion was certainly noted, but there wasn't any practical forum in which this kind of attitude could be manifested. Of course, there were discussions in people's homes, and in unofficial places. But there was no possibility, in the first two or three years after the invasion of Czechoslovakia, to invite anyone from there. In 1972 I invited Petr Štembera to exhibit at Akumulatory 2. He couldn't come, but he sent materials and I installed the exhibition in his name. Jiří Valoch visited, but this was two years later, in 1974. There were also some letters in circulation protesting against the imprisonment, in Czechoslovakia, of an artist connected to Fluxus, Milan Knížák. I signed perhaps three of these letters.

KKW: Was Knížák already in contact with Poland before?

JK: I don't think so. Klaus Groh's book *Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa* was one of the first sources of information on Eastern European nonofficial art in 1971 or 1972. But Groh's book was only distributed in a small number of copies because the book was withdrawn from circulation. I found out from Groh many years later that the DuMont publishing house was ordered to take it out of circulation in view of a political deal between East and West Germany because two or three East German unofficial artists were presented in the book. Quite a large part of the edition was destroyed, shredded, with the exception of those copies that had already been distributed. I had already received a copy.

KKW: I would like to turn now to the NET manifesto that you wrote in 1971 together with Andrzej Kostołowski.[2] The first point raised in NET is that "a NET is open and uncommercial. . . ."
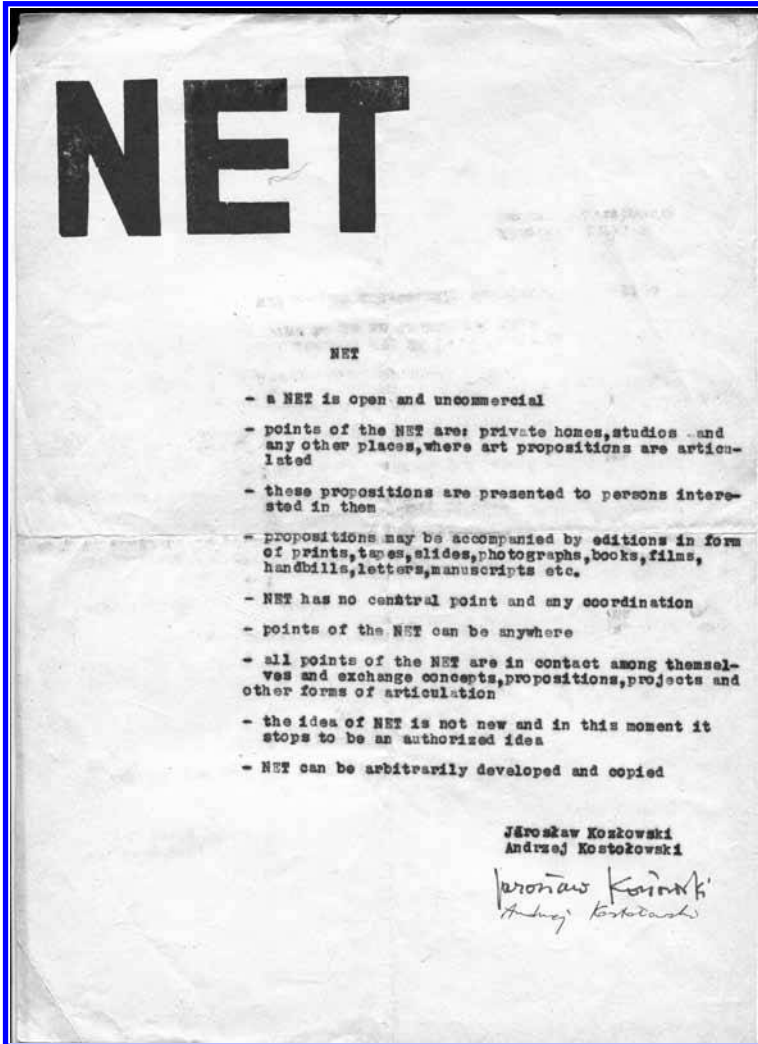
JK: We wrote it in 1971 and it was sent off at the beginning of 1972, or at the end 1971. Kostołowski and I met very frequently and talked about art, swapping books, and so on. The idea of ignoring all the physical barriers and borders which limited contacts was born in a very natural way, as was the idea of using the post to get in contact with various artists around the world—and finding among the artists on the other side of the iron curtain attitudes analogous to those we had here, except that they were contesting a slightly different ideology. Here, ideology was really related to the totalitarian system, while over there it was about commerce, institutions, the whole commercialization of art, and the institutionalization of art.

KKW: Other conceptual artists in Central Europe whom I've interviewed have mentioned that they felt betrayed by the West's swift institutionalization of conceptualist tendencies. Were you aware from the outset of the limitations experienced by artists operating within a market system? After all, many people in Poland in the 1960s and '70s held a somewhat idealistic view of the West. To what extent do you think artists here were envious of Western artists' commercial possibilities?

JK: The market didn't play any kind of role over here at all—it didn't exist. Andrzej [Kostołowski] and I were aware of how the art market func-

2   Andrzej Kostołowski, coauthor of the NET manifesto, art critic, and curator of several major
     Polish art festivals, such as the Miastko meetings in Świeszyn (1971–81) and,
     with Maria Pinińska-Bereś, of the 10th International Cracow Meetings, BMA Galeria,
     Cracow 1981.

NET

- a NET is open and uncommercial

- points of the NET are: private homes, studios and any other places, where art propositions are articulated

- these propositions are presented to persons interested in them

- propositions may be accompanied by editions in form of prints, tapes, slides, photographs, books, films, handbills, letters, manuscripts etc.

- NET has no central point and any coordination

- points of the NET can be anywhere

- all points of the NET are in contact among themselves and exchange concepts, propositions, projects and other forms of articulation

- the idea of NET is not new and in this moment it stops to be an authorized idea

- NET can be arbitrarily developed and copied

Jarosław Kozłowski
Andrzej Kostołowski

Andrzej Kostołowski and Jarosław Kozłowski. NET manifesto, 1970. Typescript with rubber stamp. Image courtesy of Jarosław Kozłowski.

tioned—its corruption and the major role of gallery and museum dealers. The Western market didn't swallow up artists associated with conceptualism at first though—this happened significantly later, somewhere in the second half of the 1970s perhaps, or even later. To begin with, conceptual art was very much aimed against the idea of modernism with all its implications, most notably against Greenberg. It was concerned with analyzing the language and the function of art. Leftist tendencies, and

an interest in the interpretation of Marxism, were also a feature of Western conceptualism.

KKW: Emerging from Minimalism?

JK: Emerging from Minimalism through Kosuth. There was his famous text "1975" in *The Fox*, as well as writings by Art and Language in Britain.

KKW: So people on either side of the iron curtain were becoming aware of the parallel systems of control imposed by the Cold War framework.

JK: It's hard for me to say if this awareness was very widespread. To some, maybe, the West seemed to be a good thing, with the perverted pleasure it guaranteed. But there was also a degree of awareness that prompted cynicism.

KKW: In another interview, you even said that you felt the West's system of control was more sordid.

JK: It was cleverer, more intelligent. The authorities' pragmatism was rather primitive here; their activities more transparent. When I had to take every exhibition invitation card we proposed to print at Akumulatory 2 to the censors, it all seemed a bit puerile. They were ready to buy or accept anything provided it was presented in such a way that it didn't arouse suspicion; of course, it could have done, but it was a matter of interpretation. In a way it was a simpleminded system. But the perversity of ownership, and the standard concept of freedom that the West attached to the function of art, camouflaged very clever and insidious forms of pressure and control.

KKW: I'm very interested in the specific form that the NET manifesto took. It conveys an "aesthetic of its administration," to borrow art historian Benjamin Buchloh's term. It's somehow para-legal, with its logo, bullet points, and signatures.

JK: This is because bureaucratic stamps played a crucially important role in Poland at that time. In part, we stamped as a way of ridiculing this para-institutional activity. But we also wanted to make sure that the form wouldn't be clear to the censors and controllers at the postal service. It worked. The assumption was if something was stamped then it had important value. Of course the letters "NET" on the stamp were just cut from erasers.

KKW: It looks very official.

JK: It looks very official, and that kind of official emblem allowed it to pass through the postal service's control. In Poland at that time there was a peculiar institution that was rather humorously called the "postal exchange office." It was some sort of a contradiction in terms because the postal service by its very nature deals with exchange. So they checked all the mail but they didn't destroy the NET mailings.

KKW: The manifesto is in many ways an absurd document. You announced that "the idea of the NET is not new and in this moment it stops being an authorized idea," and then, finally, that "NET can be arbitrarily developed and copied." You invoke the issue of copyright in order to reject it.

JK: Yes. We said that there would be no copyright. That there would be no coordination of it, control over it, that it cannot be steered. There was this aspect of mockery, but NET was also strategically designed to look like an official document. An official document sent by something that isn't institutionally rooted anywhere and isn't an institution but uses the symbolism of the institution. That's why the beady eyes of the controllers passed it over.

KKW: You sent out more than 350 copies of the NET manifesto. Presumably it was an enormously laborious task to type all these letters by hand?

JK: I typed all these letters on an old typewriter using sheets of carbon paper. It was quite a job for some good weeks.

KKW: The NET manifesto was always accompanied by a list of those invited to participate, and their names and addresses. . . .

JK: Yes, of course. Or at least everyone got the list to begin with. Later it wasn't so coordinated any more. At some point I stopped sending the list. I sent out a few batches of the manifesto with the first list, and then there were two or three appendices. But later I stopped sending appendices because the whole thing became internally generative and there was no longer the need to inform people about it. I think this is still happening!

KKW: The manifesto states that "points of the NET are: private homes, studios and any other places, where art propositions are articulated," wherever "propositions are presented to persons interested in them," and that these "propositions may be accompanied by editions in the form of prints, tapes, slides, photographs, books, films, handbills, letters, manu-

Persons invited to be co-creators of NET

CECILE ABISH -89e9 Francis Place,North Bergen,New York,USA

KEITH ARNATT - Tintern Forest,Wales,G.Britain

CARL ANDRE - Box 540,Cooper Station,New York,USA

ANGELO DE AQUINO - Via Amedei 5,20123,Milano,Italy

GABOR ATTALAI - Budapest I,Groza rkp.11,Hungary

MARTIN BARRÉ - 52 rue de Montparnasse,ParisXIV,France

IAIN BAXTER - 1419 Riverside Drive,North Vancouver,British Col.,Canada

GEER VAN BEIJEREN - Richard Wagnerstr.8,Amsterdam 9,Holland

JERZY BEREŚ - Kraków,Siemaszki 22/24,Poland

LASZLO BEKE - BudapestbIX,Thaly Kalman U.56 I/3a,Hungary

ANDRZEJ BEREZIAŃSKI - Poznań,Dzierżyńskiego 119 m 25,Poland

JULIEN BLAINE - 20 rue d´Arcueil 75,Paris XIV,France

MARINUS BOEZEM - Gruttershof 59,Gorinchem,Holland

WŁODZIMIERZ BOROWSKI - Brwinów k.Warszawy,Kępińska 70,Poland

WIESLAW BOROWSKI - Warszawa,Rozbrat 32 m 21,Poland

GEORGE BRECHT - 83 Landbroke Grove,London W.11,G.Britain

DAVID BRIERS - 15 Park Mansions,Prince of Wales Drive,London S.W.11
                                                            G.Britain

JANOS BRENDEL - Poznań,Piękna 12,Poland

STANLEY BROUWN - Willem de Zwijgarlaan 60,Amsterdam,Holland

DANIEL BUREN - 21 rue de Navarin,Paris IX,France

BALTHASAR BURKHARD - Junkerngasse 25,Bern,Switzerland

GIANFREDO CAMESI - 29 rue de Genéve,1225,Chéne-bourg,Genéve,Switzerland

UGO CARREGA - Via Borgonuove 20,20121 Milano,Italy

LUCIANO CASTELLI - Seefeldstr.5,Luzern,Switzerland

CHRISTO - 48 Howard St.,New York,USA

URSZULA CZARTORYSKA - Łódź,Wójtowska 24,Poland

ANTONIO DIAS - 5 Via Amedei,20123 Milano,Italy

JAN DIBBETS - Hasebroekstr.20,Amsterdam,Holland

CHRISTOS DIKEAKOS - 2676 West 13-th.Av.,Vancouver 8,British Col.,Canada

ERNER DOV - Kibeutz Hatzer-Achded 90-670,Israel

List of persons invited to be cocreators of NET, 1970. Typescript. Image courtesy of Jarosław Kozłowski.

scripts etc." So the "points of the NET" connect places and objects rather than people. But then there is also the list of names and addresses.

JK: The points of the NET are people—that's to say—places connected to people.

KKW: And also objects? Aren't objects also granted a sort of new autonomy to circulate here? Are these points part of the NET, too?

JK: But they are ones that begin to move. . . .

KKW: I know you are interested in drawing. Did you ever think about drawing or diagramming NET? If the network existed in some sort of environment, what would it look like? Would it consist of points? Or of constellations?

JK: They would envelop the whole world. . . .

KKW: The manifesto states that "all points of the NET are in contact among themselves and exchange concepts, propositions, projects and other forms of articulation." How would you show that all points are in contact with all the other points?

JK: It would be very difficult to create such a map. I have never been tempted to try. As a matter of fact it would not be possible, because I was not able to control NET's development.

KKW: In a way, *East Art Map*'s big black poster is an attempt, isn't it? But I noticed that your network is misrepresented there. You appear to float about in isolation—without lines linking you to anyone else. Still, perhaps a more complete map like this could be made based on the NET documentation one day. Bruno Latour argues that in actor network theory every person is already a network—a star among other stars and constellations that link to one another in complex, but ultimately traceable ways. I like this idea because it seems to expand, just as the NET itself has done. And of course I think it is crucial to move away from the idea of the artist as just an isolated individual. Especially when talking about the former Eastern bloc. There is nothing to be gained from repeating the old stereotypes of total isolation now. Of course people felt isolated, but they also developed strong networks.

JK: Well, in a sense, yes. I met László Beke, much later, thirty years after NET. He said what a mistake it was that we didn't copyright the name NET—we would have been millionaires now!

KKW: Of course!

My current research is partially fueled by my dislike of the term Zeitgeist. It seems to me to be a mental shortcut. After all, people exchanged ideas in so many concrete ways.

JK: Yes, it is false. It wasn't Zeitgeist. The appearance of conceptual art in Poland was not a result of some kind of osmosis but was rather con-

nected, among other things, with the presence of the Polish Construc-tivism tradition and the contacts of Strzemiński and Kobro with Russian artists. This was also a network in a sense.

KKW: Yes—a network that went on to become the basis of a collection. It seems that participants in the mail art network were to some extent also building personal collections of the work received through the network. But NET was not about collecting—you did not ask those you added to your list to send you anything.

JK: No. It was about exchange and getting to know people.

KKW: You announced that the NET existed, and could be used.

JK: Of course, after a month or two all sorts of mail arrived. To begin with I organized "receptions" where I displayed the materials received. Then later these materials served as a basis for inviting artists to Akumulatory 2, which I founded in 1972 with the help of four art history students from Poznań University. The gallery was located in the students' club, and partially supported by the Students' Union. During the almost twenty years of its activity, we organized 172 solo exhibitions, five group exhibi-tions, and thirty lectures with Polish and international artists and theo-reticians. Seventy to eighty percent of the gallery's exhibition program was based on the contacts that developed through NET.

**KKW:** You referred to these early meetings as "receptions" rather than "exhibitions?"

JK: Yes, receptions. The first such reception of NET materials was in my apartment at 7 p.m., on Monday 22nd May 1972. The mailings were very diverse. People sent works and letters and printed materials. I invited ten close friends, artists, art historians, and writers. I included all the pieces we had received by that time. Twenty-four artists from different countries sent responses.

KKW: I see that the materials were also on the floor.

JK: Yes there was no more space. The photographs were developed by the Security Services, by the way.

KKW: The secret police entered your apartment after just forty-five minutes?

JK: Yes. They took it all down and took it away. After a year, they returned most of the material, but not everything.
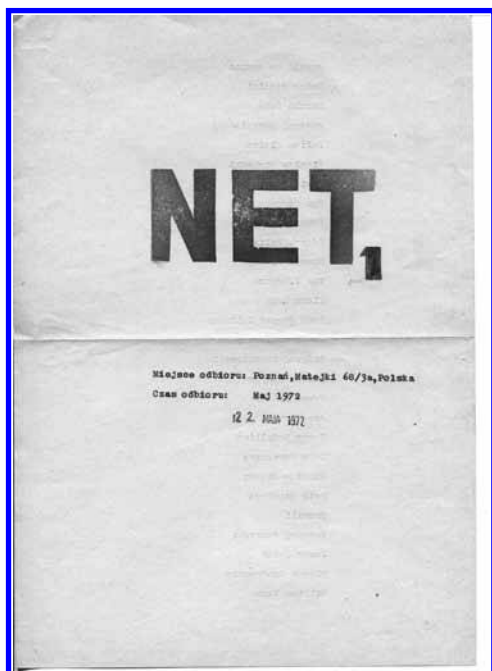
Invitation to NET₁ reception at Matejki 68/3z, Poznań, May 22, 1972.
Typescript with rubber stamp. Image courtesy of Jarosław Kozłowski.

KKW: And I understand that you were summoned to be interrogated?

JK: Yes, it did drag on for some time. I don't know who out of these ten people I invited reported it to the security agents. I have my suspicions, but no certainty.

KKW: And the others were also interrogated?

JK: Yes.

KKW: What did the Security Services want to know? What questions did they ask?

JK: The leitmotiv was that we were in the process of founding an anarchist organization directed against the state [laughs]. Later, they calmed down and a day before the court hearing was due to take place I was informed that they had abandoned the idea.

KKW: And how did you defend yourself against the accusation of anarchism?

Installation of materials received at the first NET₁ reception, Matejki 68/3z, Poznań, May 22, 1972.
Image courtesy of Jarosław Kozłowski. Photograph by Jarosław Kozłowski.

NET₁ reception Matejki 68/3z, Poznań, May 22, 1972 (Tadeusz Brzozowski, Jacek Zagajewski, Jerzy
Ludwiński, and Andrzej Bereziański—from left to right). Image courtesy of Jarosław Kozłowski.
Photograph by Jarosław Kozłowski.

Angelo de Aquino
Gabor Attalai
Laszlo Beke
Andrzej Bereziański
Julien Blaine
Wiesław Borowski
David Briers
Ugo Carrega
Erner Dov
Zdenek Felix
Konrad Fischer
Tom J.Gramse
Klaus Groh
Hans Werner Kalkmann
Marek Konieczny
Andrzej Kostołowski
Laszlo Lakner
Bernd Löbach
Anna Lovell
Barry McCollion
Geza Perneczky
Maurice Roquet
Petr Stembera
Toselli
Andrzej Turowski
Janos Urban
Pierre Vandrepote
William Vazan

List of artists' propositions received at NET$_1$, Matejki 68/3z, Poznań, May 22, 1972.
Image courtesy of Jarosław Kozłowski.

JK: Well, I tried to explain that it was all about art and had no connection with any political manifestation. It was quite tiresome. It went on for almost a year.

KKW: But in spite of all this you decided to organize a second reception, this time in the Club of the Union of Polish Artists. Was this change of context a critical game of sorts? The move from your apartment to the Union Club somehow resonates with the institutionalization of conceptual art in the West. . . . Isn't it significant that you decided to take advantage of the protection of an official institution?

JK: Well, it was only the club, a meeting place for local artists where they could talk and drink coffee or beer, not the Gallery of the Artists'
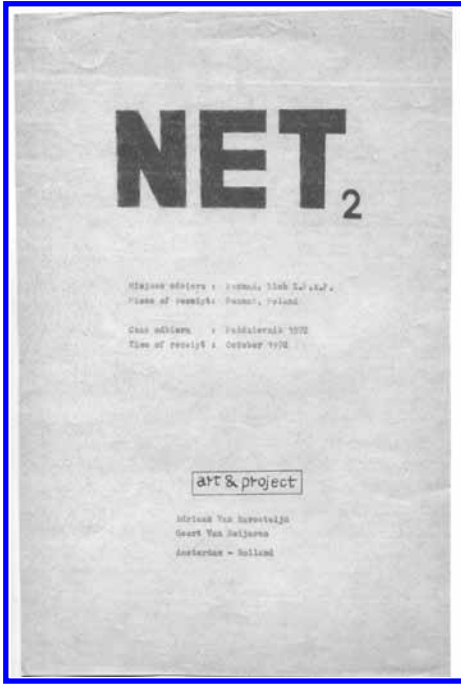
Invitation to NET$_2$ reception of materials from art & project, at Klub Z.P.A.P., Poznań, October 1972. Image courtesy of Jarosław Kozłowski.

Union—this gave it a different meaning. The point was to do another show and not to give up. We couldn't use the apartment because of the way the previous "reception" there had encroached on my privacy. An alternative place had to be found. In this sense, yes, we were under the umbrella of an association. But the most important thing was not to give up after the first raid—to do something once again, even just for two hours.

KKW: What was included in the second reception?

JK: It consisted of printed materials sent by art & project, documenting a few years of the gallery's activity, presenting what was shown at more than sixty exhibitions.[3] They were also on the NET list. Hanging the pages from wires was the quickest and easiest way, and the least damaging to

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3   Art & project—the leading contemporary art gallery in Amsterdam of the 1970s and '80s and a key platform for conceptual art, founded in 1968 by Adriaan van Ravesteijn and Geert van Beijeren.

NET$_2$ reception of materials from art & project, at Klub Z.P.A.P., Poznań, October 1972 (Anna Kozłowska, Andrzej Jur, unknown). Image courtesy of Jarosław Kozłowski. Photograph by Jarosław Kozłowski.

the documents. It was a very quick and spontaneous action. The aim was to organize a second reception quickly.

KKW: Looking at the photographs of the event it is clear that this was all about reception and the recipients' experience. . . .

JK: Yes, they are very important.

KKW: Was there any trouble this time?

JK: Well, they [the Security Services] boasted they had seen the exhibition and that they had commented on it.

KKW: In some of her texts on your work, Luiza Nader has developed ideas around the utopia of privacy. I'm interested in the tension between individual, private attitudes and the desire to produce an expanded collective such as NET.

JK: It was never a group. NET was concerned with dialogues between individuals.

KKW: You have said that the NET worked according to a system of permanent recommendation and expansion. The manifesto sets the structure in motion. I find this interesting because it seems to me that it has to do with trust. The element of trust was also important at Akumulatory 2, which you set up in 1972. You invited artists to take over the space, without censoring them in any way.

JK: Yes. There was nothing formal or written, but artists still had a certain responsibility as a matter of principle. After all, they were all strangers to me and when they came to have their show, they would all live at my place. There was no state sponsorship.

KKW: So Akumulatory 2 was a democratic space, based on freedom and responsibility?

JK: Responsibility was enormously important. Also because the authorities (censorship, Security Service, administration of the building) played silly and provocative games against the Gallery. For instance, sometimes they didn't let us into the gallery space just before the announced date of the exhibition. In such cases we had to quickly look for an alternative space. It happened several times. Altogether, we organized exhibitions in seven different spaces.

KKW: In the manifesto, you write that "NET can be arbitrarily developed and copied." Is this not an abdication of responsibility for how the idea will continue?

JK: This was something that the Security Services found very provocative. During our "conversations" I was often accused of avoiding responsibility—they did not like the fact that it seemed blurry. But, in a way it was not contradictory.

KKW: The statement that "NET has no central point and no coordination" suggested to me the ideal of self-management. The creation of a new framework for relationships that can be replicated in any situation.

JK: Trust and responsibility are inscribed in the proposition, and this determines the lack of control.

KKW: Yes. It seems to me that some mail artists have tended to try to exert more control over their exchanges—for example the issue of whether anyone should be allowed to join the "network," or whether entry should be somehow vetted for quality. Others, of course, laughed at such attempts and found them to be in contradiction with the structure of an open system. There were a lot of people who were, and remain, absolutely ready to correspond with everyone. Géza Perneczky has argued that mail art is more a sociological than an artistic phenomenon. I think he meant that communication itself was what mattered, not so much what was being sent. What is the relationship between NET and mail art?

JK: I treated my first five correspondence pieces as a form of mail art, but I didn't think of NET as a mail art activity. It was just that the mail was the only possible way of distributing the idea. The rest developed in its own way.

KKW: In the manifesto you refer to "propositions" rather than art works.

JK: Yes, propositions. Ideas matter more than than the realizations of ideas.

KKW: And what did you have in mind when you wrote that "the idea of the NET is not new"?

JK: We wanted to be pragmatic. So we didn't want to emphasize that it was our idea as authors—authorship would have interfered.

KKW: So why did you both sign the manifesto?

JK: Because we wanted to act responsibly.

KKW: In the 1980s György Konrád wrote of the need to develop horizontal human relationships in opposition to the vertical relationships of military society. He argued that Eastern and Western Europe should unify, so as to offer an alternative to the superpowers and the Cold War division of the globe.

JK: We didn't want to limit NET to some European structure, because this would be a sort of declaration and a definition that would be contrary to the idea of universality.

KKW: Ultimately then, what was it that was shared by individuals through NET? Was it not this sense of responsibility and solidarity?

JK: Yes. We were sharing attitudes.

KKW: Géza Perneczky has recalled his concern at reading a mail art call saying: "Become a mail artist and every day will be like Christmas!" because the desire to possess works or objects is a form of primitive accumulation. Are you saying that NET was about ideas rather than objects?

JK: In a sense the objects and works are peripheral. But it is only natural that the registration of an idea—the proposition—becomes the language of exchange.

KKW: Looking at the list of names of the first NET mailing today, it is striking how many important artists were included in the circle from the start. Was it always so exclusive?

JK: Less important artists also appeared! As I mentioned, Akumulatory 2 came to be the continuation of the idea of NET, and we worked with established and also with very young, unknown artists. For example, we had an exhibition of work by Richard Long. Exhibitions always lasted for four days maximum, due to the fact that we shared the space with a student nightclub. The following week we had a show by a fourth-year art student. There was no hierarchy.

KKW: Which acquaintances made through the NET became the most important for you, as an artist and personally?

JK: To answer that would be to establish a hierarchy! I certainly developed excellent contacts with the Fluxus artists Emmett Williams, Eric Andersen, Geoffrey Hendricks, Ken Friedman. I was in touch with George Maciunas, although we never met—he was the one who proposed the Fluxus festival at Akumulatory 2. It was the last festival before his death. Also New York artist John Matthews whom I've never met, but we still correspond. . . . It would be a long list: Robin Klassnik and Richard Long from Great Britain, Peter Mandrup and Lone Arendal from Denmark, Carlfriedrich Claus from East Germany, Rene Bloch, Franz Erhard Walther, Hanne Darboven, Reiner Ruthenbeck from West Germany, On Kawara, Carl Andre, Lawrence Weiner, John Blake from the States, Bill Vazan from Canada, Mieko Shiomi from Japan, and many others. There was very good contact and exchange of ideas with South American artists, such as Angelo de Aquino and Clemente Padín, perhaps because we were sharing similar experiences and problems—facing politically different but quite similar totalitarian systems.

KKW: Does this alternative international network correspond to your idea of the "third ring," which Luiza Nader describes as "the realm of freedom" or "sovereignty"?[4]

JK: What I call the "third ring" is located between reality and art understood as a kind of mirror of reality.

KKW: A mirror of reality? Do you mean reflection theory?

JK: No, not only. The "third ring" concerns the whole art scene, both the functioning of art and the understanding of art as a kind of sovereign, parallel reality. The third circle is like a ball that bounces off the wall of reality and hits the wall of art and comes back to the wall of reality, and takes on elements from both these defined spheres.

Jarosław Kozłowski (b. Srem, Poland, 1945).

KKW: A form of dialogue then?

JK: It's rather a kind of permanent dialectics between reality and art, without entering categorically into the sphere of so-called reality or the sphere of so-called art!

POZNAŃ, FEBRUARY 1, 2012.

TRANSLATED BY HANNAH KEMP-WELCH

4   Luiza Nader, "Exercises in Sovereignty: On the Works of Jarosław Kozłowski from the Sixties and Seventies," in *Question Marks: Jarosław Kozłowski*, ed. Bożena Czubak (Warsaw: Profile Foundation, 2010), 68.

MAIL ART
A BRIDGE TO FREEDOM

CLEMENTE PADÍN

We are fighting in art for the future. Postcard by
Robert Rehfeldt, 1987. Clemente Padín's archive.

Artistic models born from new expressive possibilities and media newly
emerging out of technology in the 1960s and 1970s were indispensable
to the consolidation of new art trends. While contemporary criticism is
doing everything in its means to perpetuate and appropriate all that was
produced during those years, there remain critical divisions that avoid
uniformity in their consideration of the values that generated such prac-
tices, and that challenge the barriers that limit critical thinking and con-
ventions that constrict dialogue. Most significantly, they contest the
permanent denial of the real-life conditions, oftentimes foundational, of
those artistic formations produced out of particular circumstances of
social, economic, and political life. I refer here especially to the social polit-
ical formations of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, in both Eastern Europe
and most of Latin America, which today we do not hesitate to call anti-
democratic and hostile to human rights.

The Anglo-Saxon critical model of conceptualism, forcefully
imposed on official historiography and embedded in artistic institutions,
especially museums, is unable to critically establish the foundations of
conceptual art's emergence nor the artistic practices of conceptualism in
those Latin American countries and other parts of the world that faced
dictatorships. The military and dictatorial regimes were decisive factors

in the forms of production and artistic distribution during those periods. Current research is recovering many documents, artworks, artists, collectives, and movements that are now being reconsidered.

The recovery of archives of practices and systems of alternative artistic circulation, greatly important during those years, suggests an emphasis placed on certain strategies and tactics through which we can identify other instruments of analysis. In this sense, conceptual strategies become very relevant when reconsidering the movements of institutions such as museums, galleries, exhibitions, and archives, in the face of globalization and neoliberal strategies that collectively devastate the political cultures of today's world. One could go so far as to claim that by reconsidering the conceptual production of the 1960s and 1970s, we aim toward approaching a certain sense of utopia still capable of nurturing the horizon of the possible.

Only in this sense may we account for the period's increase of certain art tendencies in Eastern European countries under the authority of Russian Communism and in those Latin American countries oppressed by dictators backed by the United States to challenge the expansion of the Castro ideology. Here we might consider the fact of the almost simultaneous fall of these regimes.

Most significant is the massive expansion of mail art as a means to denounce and document the situation and to communicate and diffuse artistic devices that were being elaborated in response to the political climate. Official mail was protected by international treaties that had to be respected by both democracies and dictatorships, and thus became one of the only possible means of communication between artists living under distinct political and economical conditions. As a result, mail art—which necessarily values the development of communication systems over the merely aesthetic—became the principal artistic medium. This was one of the many characteristics of mail art that allowed for communication between different artists within distinct fields, since what mattered most was not producing meaningful formulations or following artistic trends, but rather the quality of the product of communication, which was judged only on the basis of its expressive functionality, its capacity to divulge meaning.

We should similarly consider the expansion of conceptualism in these countries, categorically different from those metropolitan countries where the movement was originally born. On the one hand, we encounter the formal consideration of Joseph Kosuth's "art as idea as idea," and

on the other hand, the following statement made by Argentinean conceptual artists, the authors of the paradigmatic experience that goes by the name Tucumán Arde:

> We would like to restore the words, the dramatic actions, and the images, to a place where they can fulfill a revolutionary role, where they will be useful, where they can be turned into "arms for the struggle." Art is whatever mobilizes and agitates. Art is whatever radically rejects this way of living and says: let's do something to change this.[1]

If we take into consideration Duchamp's position that art can be born either from art or from life, we can make the claim that Anglo-Saxon conceptual art is born from art and that Latin American and Eastern European conceptual art is born from life.

Among countries with similar systems of government, such as those in Eastern Europe and in Latin America when they were governed by arbitrary dictatorships, a relationship emerges almost naturally between mail art and other forms of art that are not widely celebrated in contemporary criticism—for example, with experimental poetry and photography. It can be said that, formally speaking, we Latin Americans were in a better position to manage the production and diffusion of our works. By contrast, the repression of our spaces acquired an apocalyptic and disturbing character with the disappearances and deaths of thousands and thousands of the regime's opponents.

Not much later than at the end of the 1960s, these international exchanges began to develop from tepidly passing along publications to swapping postcards and artworks, and later, at a more personal level, to sharing denouncements and manifestos. It was not coincidental that during these years we saw the first "weavings" of artists' networks devoted to communication, the inaugural *networkings* that attempted to overcome, through "artistic coups," the most difficult life conditions that were being imposed by tyrants. In my personal case, I had the opportunity to make space in my magazines, first in *Los Huevos del Plata* and then in *OVUM 10* and *OVUM*, for numerous artists from Eastern Europe—for example, Robert Rehfeldt, Jeff Birger, Michael Groschopp, Birgen Jesch, Karsten

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1   Inés Katzenstein, *Listen, Here, Now! Argentine Art of the 1960s: Writings of the Avant-Garde* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2004), 326.

Matthes, Detlef Kappia, Hans-Jürgen Hess, Friedrich Winnes, Uwe Dressler, Mathias Tietke, Knut Hartwich, Joachim Stange, Jens Barkschat, Sal-Gerd Beyer, Karla Sache, Stephan Jacob, Jörg Sonntag, and Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt from the German Democratic Republic; Jindřich Procházka, Ladislav Nebeský, Milán Grygar, Jiří Valoch, Jiří Kocman, Milan Adamčiak, Karel Adamus, Zdeněk Barbenka, Bohumila Groverova, Josef Hiršal, Josef Honnys, Petr Štembera, Jan Wojnar, and Ladislav Novák from the former Czechoslovakia; Miroljub Todorović, Bálint Szombathy, Franci Zagoričnik, Milenko Matanović, Dreja Rotar, Andrzej Szubzda, Biljana Tomić, Ivan Jelinčić, Dobrica Kamperelić, Jaroslav Supek, Nicola Šindik, Nenad Bogdanović, Voik Branko, Ivan Jelinčić Merlin, and Radomir Mašić from the former Yugoslavia; Janos Urban, Gábor Tóth, Rudolf Takács, and Robert Swierkiewicz from Hungary; K. Parczewska, Andrzej Dudek-Dürer, Andrzej Wielgosz, Pawel Petasz, Piotr Rogalski, Sztuka Wysyłkowa, Tomasz Schulz, Adam Kogociuk, Zdzisłtaw Jurkiewicz, Roland Szefferski, Jarosław Kozłowski, and Piotr Rypson from Poland; and Julian Mereutza from Romania. I mustn't omit a fantastic figure, the Chilean artist Guillermo Deisler, who was exiled for many years, first in the Bulgarian city of Plovdiv and then in Halle (GDR). As a result of the sociopolitical conditions at that time, his famous cooperative editionsUNI/vers served as a bridge between artists from Eastern Europe and colleagues in the West.

Around 1984, with the fall of the Uruguayan dictator, I had the opportunity to recover my passport and travel outside Uruguay. Subsequently, thanks to assistance from the North American Fluxus artist Dick Higgins, I managed to obtain a DAAD grant for a three-month stay in West Berlin, during the time when the West was being opened to the socialist camp. Thanks to certain actions taken that to this day remain unclear to me, I had the opportunity to visit artists in East Berlin on two occasions, together with the anthropologist Volker Haumann, who led me by the hand across the Wall in a subway that crossed the old capital. Consequently, in March 1984, I was able to meet Robert Rehfeldt and other artists. Unfortunately, during my first visit with him there was enough time only to exchange a few words, but we were able to arrange another more prolonged visit, during which I might add I attempted to cook a steak *a la criolla*, which means meat placed directly on top of burning logs. I still remind Robert that we passed the time by reading a fragment of the *Ursonate* by Schwitters. I left our meeting with artworks by almost every artist in the group that exhibited in Montevideo at the National Library in November 1986.

I should confess that Robert Rehfeldt's personal ethics made a great impression on me. He was already a recognized artist in West Germany when he moved to the GDR out of his personal conviction that capitalism was an obsolete economic and social formation and couldn't respond to the essential needs of the human being. For him, socialism was the only option. And when he discovered the limitations placed on public freedom in the GDR, he opted not to turn his back on the place but rather to put his best efforts into the fight to reestablish those rights. The truth is that real socialism, such as that which was practiced in Eastern Europe, was a failure that culminated in the fall of the Berlin Wall, the reunification of Germany, and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The premature death of Robert Rehfeldt disallowed him from finishing his work and participating in the historical events that marked his successes, including anthological expositions of mail art. However, his ideas and concepts follow us and will guide us for as long as the human being continues to struggle to prevail and preserve itself against economic systems that seem born to annihilate it, to destroy humans, their home, and the earth. We can find a reflection of this spirit in one of his sayings, "Your ideas help my ideas," in which he expresses his conviction regarding fraternity between human beings.

The same goes for the cooperative magazine *UNI/vers*, led by Guillermo Deisler, Rehfeldt's Latin American friend, exiled a few kilometers outside Berlin in Halle, whom Rehfeldt could not see because moving from one city to another was prohibited. For artists living in the countries of Europe and Latin America, mail art was one possible way of crossing borders without the need to travel, without the need for visas, passports, and police checkpoints. East German artists were not disappeared or assassinated like they were in Latin America, but they were silenced, sequestered in their cities, and incarcerated for their opposition to the communist regime. Mail art was considered, like other artistic forms, a subversive activity directed against the state and repressed as such. Guillermo Deisler, while in exile, wrote the following poem-concept: ". . . it happens that, at times, I tire of being foreign. . . ." Upon first reading, this seems to make an allusion to his condition of political exile, far from his homeland and roots. However, in light of his work, one can perceive the suggestion of a movement toward absolute co-inhabiting of the earth, toward a world without borders, without nationalities, without patriotic chauvinisms, a world for man-birds sharing limitless space, an interminable sky. From this place, the feather, a symbol-object, also expresses

the thematic of his work. From there, too, Deisler's cooperative magazine *UNI/vers*, a work by *uni/vers(al)* men, artists of the global network (*networking*) were brought together and taken toward (*vers*) a *UNI/que* homeland, without foreigners, without exiles. . . . *UNI/vers*, for many years, was the only means through which artists from Eastern Europe met their colleagues.

The activities of West German editor-artists serve as another example of an axis of inexplicit cooperation. One such individual was Klaus Groh, with whom I communicated by mail until 1973. Groh ran the small editorial *International Artist Cooperation* (*I.A.C.*) in Oldenburg and acted as a kind of hinge in the articulation of international communications, often with Latin American artists oppressed by dictators and also artists living in socialist countries, with their modest but fundamental zines (*cuadernillos*), never larger than a quarter of the DIN A4 format size. Their editions kept our denunciations and condemnations of the Latin dictators up-to-date, especially the denouncement of the terrible situation that our small towns faced under the regime of terror, where the military—fighting against democracy with the backing of the CIA and North American transnational corporations—acted with impunity. Moreover, Klaus Groh published *Instruments74* (1974), *Omaggio a Beuys* (1975), and *Sign(o)Graphics* (1976), booklets that I authored along with many others. Another editor I cannot leave out is the artist Klaus Staeck, who, together with Groh, kept alive our country's alternative art, which was being repressed by Operation Condor, implemented by the CIA as a counteroffensive to the example set by socialist Cuba.

It was not coincidental that in April 1984, toward the end of my grant period, I organized the Latin American Mail Art exhibition (Mail-Art aus Lateinamerika) at Galeria Rene Black in West Berlin, and by doing so contradicted one the principles of mail art. I'm referring to the ecumenical character that exhibitions of mail art inherently possess (for this reason, I limited myself to inviting Latin American mail artists). As a counterpart to this show I organized another exhibition of mail art at the Public Library of Montevideo, Uruguay, with all the material that had been given to me by artists in East Berlin in December 1986. An accompanying text dedicated to Karsten Mathes, who died around that time, reads as follows:

Mail art, a multitudinous manifestation of contemporary art, involves hundreds upon hundreds of participants all over the world. Born in

the USA at the beginning of the 60s in reaction to the growing commercialization of art and the exacerbated elitism that isolated artists from their social environment, mail art quickly expanded massively as a result of the possibilities of free participation and advances in the fields of long distance communication, especially in the area of air navigation, allowing for the rapid distribution of mail, and also advances in the industry of graphic reproduction, which contributed to the important lowering of the cost of mailed artworks.

In this context, mail art generated its unspoken rules, today respected by all participants, which gave it its democratic and participatory character: free admission of received works without limitations of any order, including size (except those imposed by the mail), or particular technique; expositions without jury selection, but with the obligation of exhibiting all received works, in whatever language, verbal, visual, etc. These norms signified a clear rejection of commercial art and the entire apparatus established by the art market— galleries, journals, established criticism, museums, foundations, etc.—mainly because its followers did not expect any compensation or the return of their artworks, but were instead satisfied with the acknowledgment of being shown or having their participation recorded in a catalogue and the security that their works would not be sold.

In the German Democratic Republic, a member of the socialist camp where respect and free artistic expression are basic principles and organically integrated into the peoples' daily lives, this form of art is widely supported because its nature is well suited to these principles. The theme of these artworks expresses the preoccupation and concern of an art that is committed above all to international solidarity: the tremendous need to establish firm bases for a lasting peace that would contribute to building a better world; the struggle against hunger and poverty, against irrational exploitation of natural goods, against consumerism, against colonialism and apartheid, against religious, philosophical or racial intolerance; to establish solidarity among all groups of people fighting for liberation or nationhood, etc. There is no shortage of mature and positive mechanisms for indicating areas for reform in order to improve the GDR, nor do we lack graphic testimonies of an intense cultural activity that too few are aware of.

This exhibition brings together 56 artists from the GDR and is organized by the Asociación Uruguaya de Artistas Correo. It will begin

on the 24th of November in the "J. P. Varela" room at the National Library and will last until December 4, 1968.[2]

Without a doubt, to evaluate this text one would have to turn back to the 1980s and imagine the terrible consequences that the exhibiting artists would have had to endure had the concepts and judgments included in this text been threatening to the GDR.

Based on the condition of being a "product of communication," art requires the participation of at least two interlocutors in a situation of "dialogue," thereby materializing one of the essential characteristics of being human: the social relation, and accordingly, respect for the "other," the interlocutor. It is tragic that in generating the art market, the capitalist system deepens the alienation of the artist, who on the one hand feels an almost biological need to create and express his essence (and at the same time, to legitimize himself as a human being), and who on the other hand finds herself in the dramatic position of being inserted into an art market that obliges him or her to relinquish his aspiration to express himself freely for the exigencies of the style that responds best to the vicissitudes of buying, selling, and profit-making galleries. In other words, the artist sees himself obliged to work for art rather than to live for his art. The subaltern paths of assuming and deepening this contradiction— spiting oneself and producing directly for the market, or working for a salary outside of the area of artistic activity—in order to conserve aesthetic independence are options that bring with them the same risks but do not resolve the problem, at either the personal or the social level. There is no doubt that the artist aspires to live *by* and not *for* his or her work by transforming it into saleable goods, which only perpetuates the socioeconomic system. Moreover, the artist separates the art from its use value in order to generate an exchange function, or in other words, an art market, in which art loses its value (in order to gain in worth). The artist is the producer of works (not necessarily objects), predominantly artistic, in which the essence of the human is produced as something that manifests its "being in the world" (according to Sartre).

Artists are not special beings or illuminated by some higher power. They are normal creatures of flesh and bones, forced to reaffirm and legitimate the operative powers that make them believe that they are nothing

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2   Clemente Padín, *El Arte Correo en la Republica Democratica Alemana* (exhibition catalogue) (Montevideo, Uruguay, 1986).

more than employees at the service of the art market (and thus in a position to sell their labor power) and not beings who aspire, like everyone else, to live in peace with their work. If human nature pushes us to express our essence as human beings through symbolic activities called "artistic," it is not possible to perform them in a context in which that essence is denied. This was the paradoxical situation faced by artists from countries in Eastern Europe and Latin America suffering under dictatorships: on the one hand, they wanted to live from their work, but to achieve this they had no choice but to indirectly feed the state and its ideology; on the other hand, they could not avoid addressing the reality in which they lived *through* their work, which immediately disqualified them. The artist's alienation from his or her work will be resolved only when the society in which he lives reverses the objectives of social production from that of profiting and earning to the full and real satisfaction of human needs.

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HUNGARIAN

SCHMUCK

"SOMETHING UNNAMEABLE IN COMMON"
TRANSLOCAL COLLABORATION
AT THE BEAU GESTE PRESS

ZANNA GILBERT

In 1972, a small group of artists, thinkers, and printers moved into a large but dilapidated farm house in South Cullompton in Devon. From this rural outpost in the southwest of England they formed the Beau Geste Press, one of the most influential small presses of the 1970s. Between 1972 and 1974 they toured the Fluxshoe exhibition, printed scores of books, and compiled the publication *Schmuck*, resulting in an extensive network of collaboration with experimental artists from diverse locations. These contributions and collaborations initially originated from Fluxus but eventually expanded into a broad network of conceptual, postconceptual, and intermedial artists.[1]

    The first part of this article provides a brief account of the Beau Geste Press. Looking at *Schmuck*, I explore how this magazine was conceived as an "open forum," fostering translocal communication and networks that enabled artistic ideas to be exchanged, and demonstrating possibilities for an alternative artistic economy. In the second section I examine the two *Schmuck* periodicals that emerged from contacts in Eastern Europe, specifically Czechoslovakia and Hungary, as well as the "missing" *Schmuck*—a Latin American edition that, although never produced, found an alternative completion. In the concluding part of the article, I

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1   Olivier Debroise and Cuauhtémoc Medina, *La Era de la discrepancia: Arte y cultura visual en México 1968–1997/The Age of Discrepancies: Art and Visual Culture in Mexico*, bilingual ed. (New York and Mexico City: Turner/UNAM, 2007), 157.

contend that the model of translocal collaboration expressed by the alternative arts scene of the 1970s enabled the expression of both the particular and the local, while it simultaneously propagated a sense of shared artistic and ideological goals and values, regardless of geographical context.

My article proposes translocal artistic collaboration as a communicative model that suspends cartographic concepts of space and challenges the category "ideological conceptualism" for Latin American art. This term has been proposed in recent years as a way of reading conceptual art from Latin America, with politics as the defining and determining characteristic.[2] The term *ideological conceptualism* aimed to alter the perception of Latin American art internationally and promote the underacknowledged contribution of artists from the region to conceptual art, but it has been widely criticized as essentialist, reductive of artists' aims and methods, and directed at the inclusion of conceptual art from Latin America in the art historical canon.[3] Curator Iris Dressler describes the codification of "political" Latin American art versus "apolitical" Euro-American art as "hardly feasible."[4] Importantly, the term obscures the translocal interactions across borders that ensured a constant exchange of ideology and ideas.

Rather, it is the question of networking that is crucial to understanding how those in peripheral, experimental, and alternative art scenes managed to collaborate and share ideas. This also gives us an idea as to how influential ideas about art traveled and how they were reinterpreted according to new contexts, displaying the early possibilities of networking that we now see in digitized networking practices. The networked structure of mail art exchanges suggests a model for writing art history that defies center-periphery models, but that also cannot be encapsulated by

2   See, for example, Mari Carmen Ramírez, "A Highly Topical Utopia," in *Inverted Utopias*, ed. Mari Carmen Ramírez (Houston and New Haven, CT: Museum of Fine Arts Houston and Yale University Press, 2004) and Ramírez, "Blueprint Circuits: Conceptual Art and Politics in Latin America," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

3   See, for example, Miguel A. López, "How Do We Know What Latin American Conceptualism Looks Like?" *Afterall* no. 23 (Spring 2010), accessed April 4, 2012, http://www.afterall.org/journal/4214/how.do.we.know.what.latin.american.conceptualism.looks.likemiguela.lopez, and Zanna Gilbert, "Ideological Conceptualism and Latin America: Politics, Neoprimitivism and Consumption," in *Rebus: A Journal of Art History & Theory* no. 4 (Autumn/Winter 2009), accessed April 4, 2012, http://www.essex.ac.uk/arthistory/rebus/PDFS/Issue%204/Gilbert .pdf.

4   Iris Dressler, "Subversive Practices: Art under Conditions of Political Repression: 60s–80s/South America/Europe," in *Subversive Practices: Art under Conditions of Political Repression: 60s–80s/South America/Europe* (exhibition catalogue), ed. Hans D. Christ and Iris Dressler (Stuttgart: Wüttembergischer Kunstverein, 2010), 45.

the term *transnational*, which merely suggests that cultural production can cut across national boundaries. I suggest instead the term *translocal*, which allows both the articulation of local narratives—bearing in mind that, as Arjun Appadurai reminds us, the local constitutes the regional, national, continental, and international—and the suspension of nationalistic discourse and geographical categorizations that are constantly transgressed by circulatory practices.[5] Categorizations such as "ideological conceptualism" are unable to account for the extraordinary interplay of communication and exchange between artists during this period.

Translocality has not been widely used as an approach to artistic production. Recently, the term has been employed by Maja and Reuben Fowkes in relation to their position as art historians and curators who operate in a variety of distinct contexts. They explain, "The basic idea of being translocal is to find a way to combine the comparative perspective of the global (in the spirit of counter-globalisation rather than corporate globalism) with the rooted knowledge that comes from belonging to a specific place or community."[6] The term also appears in relation to Internet-based art and activism. In her article "Translocal Art of the Internet (Or Where Does Art Happen?)," art and media theorist Eva Wojtowicz's discussion of translocality conceives it as a state "which does not mean a location in a geographical sense, but rather networked individuals and groups of similarly-thinking people," reflecting the idea of cyberspace as a place as well as a communicative forum.[7] I apply the term here in the same sense as the Fowkes' definition, and bearing in mind the "sociability" referenced by Wojtowicz. Beyond that I refer to pre-Internet analogical networking, which is differentiated from the immediacy of the contemporary situation by the time a work took to physically travel, and by the degree of interaction and integration involved. In 1970s networking, there was a profound gap between the two localities that were connected by an exchange between individuals or groups. My conception of the translocal is a model of interaction in which exchange of objects between artists enables the enunciation of ideas and situations *at a distance*. The translocal involves experiences that occur in specific places (in the mail artwork this is signified by the stamp, the address, the mail worker, and the mailed work) as well as through travel and virtual imaginaries.

5   Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*. Vol. 1 of *Public Worlds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 18.

6   Petra Feriancová, "Translocal: Interview with Reuben and Maja Fowkes," *VLNA* 16 (2010).

7   Eva Wojtowicz, "Translocal Art of the Internet (Or Where Does Art Happen?)," *Art Inquiry: Recherches sur les Arts* 4, no. 13 (2002, revised 2010): 299–307, 2.

The translocal is an open distinction that tries to rethink the way we define and interpret how artistic production originates, doing away with absolute geographical imperatives such as "Latin American art." Through its emphasis on a locality, the translocal also allows for the emergence of the particularities of a place to be accommodated while simultaneously denying deterministic readings of that context or position. Having "something unnameable in common" did not signify a shared ideology with a set of fixed principles based on grand narratives, but instead denoted a group of artists who were committed to artistic experimentation and who positioned themselves against the state and the art market.[8]

BEGINNINGS OF A NETWORK

The inception of the Beau Geste Press came about in 1970 when the paths of Felipe Ehrenberg and Marta Hellion crossed with that of University of Exeter student David Mayor. Having just graduated from Cambridge in math and history of art, David Mayor arrived in Exeter in 1970 to study for an MA, under Mike Weaver's supervision, at the American Arts Documentation Centre. Marta Hellion and Felipe Ehrenberg had been living in London since 1968. They had left Mexico after the government's brutal repression of the student movement that culminated in the events of October 2, 1968: just weeks before the opening of the Summer Olympics in Mexico City, government forces fired on unarmed protesting students at Tlatelolco, resulting in the deaths of a substantial number of the protestors.[9] The threatening atmosphere continued into the following years and was compounded for Ehrenberg by a conservative art market hostile to experimental work. According to Ehrenberg, they "flew off in worried haste with two little kids and barely 200 dollars in our pockets," the politicized environment being cited for the couple's dislocation.[10]

Another victim of the Mexican government's hostility to independent and experimental activities was the bilingual magazine *El Corno*

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8   Felipe Ehrenberg, under the pseudonym Kyosan Bajin, quotes George Brecht, who said in 1964, "Individuals with something unnameable in common have simply naturally coalesced to publish and perform their work." *Schmuck* (South Cullompton: Beau Geste Press, 1972), 1.

9   The number of dead is still unknown, the official figure being around forty, but groups such as Comité 68 who continue to campaign for transparency estimate the death toll to be over three hundred. In 2006, Mexico's ex-president Luis Escheverría, interior minister at the time of the massacre, was arrested on charges of genocide, but the charges were eventually dismissed.

10   Rupert White, "Fluxshoe: Interviews with Felipe Ehrenberg, Stuart Reid and Barry McCallion," *Art Cornwall*, accessed June 12, 2011, http://www.artcornwall.org/interview_fluxshoe _stuart%20reid_felipe_ehrenberg2.htm.

Emplumado/The Plumed Horn, an independent publication founded by Margaret Randall, Sergio Mondragón, and Harvey Wolin. Ehrenberg contributed to several issues, and it was his first experience of working in a collective and independent publishing venture. Bilingual, experimental, and collaborative in nature, *El Corno Emplumado* published Beat poets as well as key figures in poetry from Latin America, such as the Brazilian concrete poet Haroldo de Campos.[11] Ehrenberg describes it as "a highly politicized and far-reaching magazine, which gathered the most prominent and meaningful poets, writers and artists in Anglo and Latin America."[12] By 1969, Randall and Mondragón were forced to close down the publication. The collective experience and disproportionate reaction to it demonstrated the rich artistic potential of publishing with other artists and poets, while simultaneously making it clear that the circulation and freedom of information were crucial to the government's attempts to maintain the status quo. Having control of a means of producing and disseminating information appeared to be a highly political act.[13] Recalling it as a direct response to the repressive atmosphere, Marta Hellion remembers that the magazine was "the first opportunity to reflect and compile works, ideas and political situations in a magazine: for the first time we became aware of Latin America."[14] The magazine was an early model of one of the key facets of translocal communication: the possibility to create a conceptual community between scattered groups of people who coalesced around common aesthetic interests and worldviews.

Once in London, Ehrenberg quickly connected with an alternative art scene that was engaged in the rejection of institutional exhibition spaces and the operations of private galleries.[15] Ehrenberg's work was con-

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11   Many of the Beat Generation poets, including Margaret Randall, spent time in Mexico from the 1950s onward, as did Latin American poets such as Ernesto Cardenal, Raquel Jodorowsky, and Roger Bartra. Bob Creely, Rothenberg, Nicanor Parra, William Carlos Williams, Cecilia Vicuña, and Phillip Lamantia were some of those who contributed to *El Corno Emplumado*. See Zanna Gilbert, "The Eclectic World of Felipe Ehrenberg," *ESTRO* 2 (2010): 48.

12   Ibid., 48.

13   The history of the printing press in Mexico is intricately connected to the Mexican revolution and the following years of unrest as the new establishment attempted to consolidate power. Ehrenberg also spent time in a printing workshop run by Catalonian anarchists, who were exiled in Mexico during Franco's rule.

14   Martha Hellion, "Artists' Books from Latin America," in *Printed Matter: Critical Essays* (November 2006), accessed April 4, 2012, http://www.printedmatter.org/researchroom/essays/latin.cfm.

15   In particular, he identified with the ideas promoted by Gustav Metzger's Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS), first launched in 1966, and later continued in the form of the International Coalition for the Liquidation of Art. Ehrenberg comments, "Metzger was the driving force behind the DIAS thing . . . and I became very interested in this elf-like person.

ceptual in nature, with a strong articulation against conservatism both aesthetic and political.[16] By 1970, Ehrenberg had arrived at a clear distinction between "art" and "creation," the former an ossifying category wielded by the elite and the latter a dynamic energy that cannot be institutionalized: "Creation and art are two completely different concepts for me. Creation is organic, it is internal matter. Art is a historic definition—a solidifying element."[17] David Mayor saw The Seventh-Day Chicken at Sigi Krauss's gallery, the exhibition that gave focus to these beliefs.[18] Impressed and intrigued, he invited the group to present their work at Exeter University.[19] Eventually, Ehrenberg and Hellion decided to move to Devon themselves. They moved to Langford Court, "a beautiful, thatched mansion overlooking the tiny hamlet of Clyst Hydon near Cullompton,"[20] located about fifteen miles from the city of Exeter, which the family first shared with the illustrator Chris Welch and Madeline Gallard.[21] Slightly later, they were joined by David Mayor, and for the next few years by a stream of artists, including Taikako Saito and Terry Reid. A Fluxus exhibition was initially conceived by Weaver, who was interested in concrete poetry and had met George Maciunas in the 1960s. After Mayor was given the responsibility for organizing the Fluxus exhibition, the project evolved from a historical show into an open call for participation. According to Ehrenberg it was "Dave's project to gather all his fluxdocuments into a travelling show . . . that triggered the Press into being. The idea was to help all-thumbs Dave get the thing going."[22] The conversion of the show into a contemporary "living" expression of late Fluxus initiated far-flung networks that developed at the Beau Geste Press. Ehrenberg's dislocation also did much to orient the nature of the press's collaborations. This distance was in some way ameliorated through correspondence. In

He told me he was a citizen of the world, a passport-less citizen of the world, stuck in England." See Valerie Fraser et al., "Interview with Felipe Ehrenberg at the University of Essex on the Eve of 'Xocoyotzin, the Penultimate,'" *Art and Architecture of the Americas* no. 8 (2010): 6.

16 See Issa María Benítez Dueñas, "Restructuring Emptiness and Recovering Space: The Conceptual Ehrenberg," in *Felipe Ehrenberg: Manchuria: Visión Periférica*, ed. Felipe Ehrenberg et al. (Mexico City: Editorial Diamantinia S.A de C.V, 2007).

17 Quoted in ibid., 26.

18 The Seventh-Day Chicken, a project by the short-lived Polygonal Workshop at Sigi Krauss's gallery in Covent Garden, was an exhibition of video, photography, and trash collected during the bin workers' strike in London in 1970. Sigi Krauss, a German resident in London, had turned his framing shop into a gallery dedicated to showing young, unknown artists.

19 Mayor is listed as a member of Polygonal Workshop for the show presented in Exeter.

20 White, "Fluxshoe."

21 Debroise and Medina, *La Era*, 157.

22 White, "Fluxshoe."

1970, for example, he was able to take part in the third Salón Independiente in Mexico City by creating a work made of two hundred postcards that were mailed individually from London to the exhibition.[23]

THE TRAVELING FLUXSHOE

The Fluxshoe exhibition was named by "an inspired typing error": the show was initially to be called the Fluxshow.[24] The group's ludic sensibility latched on to the new name, but this sense of fun did not stop the project from quickly developing into an ambitious touring exhibition of small British cities, complete with Fluxus performances and gatherings at each site.[25] Fluxshoe's chance baptism was not in fact mere hazard, but rather it was emblematic of the Beau Geste Press's approach, as well as its relationship to Fluxus and the flourishing network of mail art. In his 1965 manifesto *Fluxus Art-Amusement*, George Maciunas delineated the character of Fluxus works to be "simple, amusing, unpretentious, concerned with insignificances," to "require no skill or countless rehearsals," and to "have no commodity or institutional value."[26] The ad hoc submission to chance reveals a deeply held commitment to "a concept, a conviction" within the Beau Geste Press that hoped to develop a network of relationships between artists that bypassed the elitist constraints of art world systems.[27]

In 1968, the Fluxus-affiliated artist Robert Filliou proposed the idea of an "Eternal Network": a network of artists operating outside of a commodity structure. Filliou envisioned a fellowship of artists exchanging ideas and art in this "Fête Permanent" (an ongoing festival or celebration) that would replace an avant-garde model of social transformation, "a way of life that is continuous and purposeless, with no end in sight."[28]

23   The work, *Obra secretamente titulada Arriba y adelante . . . y si no pues tambien* (Work Secretly Titled Upwards and Onwards . . . and If Not Then Also), was a larger-than-life painting of a top less woman proffering her breast with one hand and showing a football branded "Mexico '70" with the other. On November 15, 1970, the two hundred postcards were sent one by one from three different post offices in London. Each was addressed to the Mexican Independent Salon at the University Museum of Science and Art (MUCA), Mexico City. The title of Ehrenberg's work refers ironically to Luis Escheverria's 1970 presidential campaign slogan: *Arriba y adelante*. As interior minister in 1968, Escheverria was widely considered responsible for the Tlatelolco massacre.

24   Simon Anderson, "Fluxus, Fluxion, Fluxshoe: The 1970s," in *The Fluxus Reader*, ed. Ken Friedman (West Sussex: Academy Editions, 1998), 25.

25   See Simon Anderson's article for a full account of the Fluxshoe.

26   George Maciunas, *Fluxus Art-Amusement* (New York: Fluxus, 1965).

27   David Mayor, *Introduction to Aktual Schmuck* (South Cullompton: Beau Geste Press, 1974), 3.

28   Steven Harris, "The Art of Losing Oneself without Getting Lost: Brecht and Filliou at the Palais Idéal," *Papers of Surrealism* 2 (Summer 2004): 8, accessed April 4, 2012, http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal2/acrobat_files/harris_article.pdf.

As art historian Stephen Harris points out, for Filliou art was "considered as a means rather than as an end in itself" and signified an "anti-formalist artistic practice that often utilizes 'poor' materials; a rejection of careerism, professionalism and specialization; a rejection of labour as a positive value, in favour of play; [and] an interest in the creative organization of leisure."[29] The spirit and ethos of Filliou's Eternal Network was reflected in the Beau Geste Press's inventive and irreverent enterprises, but it was also key to the openness that allowed translocal collaborations to develop.

Fluxshoe, as cultural historian and Fluxus scholar Simon Anderson writes, "was originally to have been a modest exercise, consisting mainly of photocopies and publications, but as it happened, with the additions and changes that organizer David Mayor allowed, it became a lesson in the living development of art, of the idea of Fluxus."[30] The experimental and open nature of the Fluxshoe conspired to create what Anderson describes as "a travelling circus of experiment and adventure."[31] Most curiously, the "open forum" meant deviation from "classical" 1960s Fluxus and its core of operators. While there has been much debate about what or who constitutes Fluxus, the activities of the Fluxshoe remain outside its historicization; the exhibition was seen at the time as an offshoot of Fluxus, allowing Fluxus ideas to develop without the programmatic restrictions imposed by Maciunas.[32] Although Maciunas stated in a 1963 letter

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See also Ken Friedman, "The Wealth of Poverty and Networks," in *At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet*, ed. Annmarie Chandler and Norie Neumark (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 419.

29   Harris, "Art of Losing Oneself," 1.

30   Anderson, "Fluxus," 25. The idea of a Fluxus "core" goes back to George Maciunas's ill-fated attempts to tightly control the group, which eventually led to a split between Maciunas and Dick Higgins. See Cuauhtémoc Medina, "Fluxus: Non-Art and Anti-Art. A Study of George Maciunas" (PhD diss., University of Essex, UK, 2003). This understanding of Fluxus is compounded by the importance ascribed to US-based collections such as that built up by Lila and Gilbert Silverman, recently donated to the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the interpretations of Hannah Higgins, but it has recently been contested by exhibitions such as Fluxus East. See Petra Stegmann, ed., *Fluxus East: Fluxus-Netzwerke in Mittelosteuropa: Ausstellungskatalog* [Fluxus East: Fluxus Networks in Central Eastern Europe: Exhibition Catalogue] (Berlin: Kunstlerhaus Bethanien, 2007). For more information on Fluxus, see Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Owen Smith, *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude* (San Diego, CA: San Diego State University Press, 1998); Friedman, *Fluxus Reader*.

31   Anderson, "Fluxus," 25.

32   Anderson also points to a number of exhibitions focusing on key Fluxus collaborators from the 1960s: "The increasingly official and academic historification of Fluxus visible in these shows, however, also ignores any number of sympathetic attempts to proselytise the idea, or extend the network." Ibid., 25.

to Dick Higgins that "Fluxus is a 'collective' and should not be associated with any particular fluxus individual," Cuauhtémoc Medina has noted that this sense of the collective was strongly tied to Maciunas's alignment with the Soviet Union. He would later regularly expel people from the group for perceived ideological and aesthetic transgressions.[33] Maciunas had a clear sense of what constituted the Fluxus aesthetic, even to the extent of writing to warn David Mayor of the "neo-baroque" character of Fluxshoe contributor Carolee Schneemann's performances. They were, according to Maciunas, "the exact opposite of fluxhaiku style event."[34]

Other artists, however, such as the Beau Geste Press interlocutor Ken Friedman, inferred a more general democratization of the arts from Maciunas's production of multiples and his desire to internationalize Fluxus. In the article "Notes on Concept Art," published in the first issue of *Schmuck*, Friedman links Fluxus with the development of concept art through the figure of Henry Flynt. He states, "Concept art is not so much an art movement or vein as it is a position or world-view, a focus for activity."[35] Friedman, appointed coordinator of Fluxus West by Maciunas in 1966, was a keen correspondent, promoting the internationalization of the mail art movement by publishing and circulating extensive lists of international participants. Although his ideas were received with some skepticism, this approach to Fluxus found its way into the attitudes and activities of the Beau Geste Press.[36] Fluxshoe's 1970s fusion, through Friedman, of Filliou's ethic of art as permanent play with Maciunas's emphasis on anthologies and crafted multiples was based upon a "socially shared idea" in which "chance, opportunity, proximity, personality and willingness-to-help, were the final arbiters of entry, acceptance and continuing involvement."[37] An understanding of the relationship between the Fluxshoe and 1960s Fluxus helps us to understand the motivation for developing artistic networks through anthological publishing. Filliou's commitment to developing connections between like-minded individuals and Maciunas's internationalist ambitions coalesced in Fluxshoe and set the parameters for the activities of the Beau Geste Press.

33   See Medina, "Fluxus: Non-Art and Anti-Art."

34   David Mayor, ed., *Fluxshoe* (exhibition catalogue) (South Cullompton: Beau Geste Press, 1972).

35   Ken Friedman, "Notes on Concept Art," *Schmuck* (South Cullompton: Beau Geste Press, 1972).

36   Letter from David Mayor to Bob Cobbing: "I think we can feel duly proud of this publication, even if none of us are too keen on the content." May 23, 1973, Beau Geste Press Correspondence File, 1972–73, A-D, TGA815/3/2-5, David Mayor Collection, Tate Archive.

37   Anderson, "Fluxus," 25.

THE BEAU GESTE PRESS: NETWORKING PRINCIPLES

The Beau Geste Press was conceived by its founders as "a new way of life" and "community of duplicators" in which artisanal printing methods met with postconceptual artistic practices: "At the Beau Geste Press we relied both on highly labour intensive practices—collating, book binding and such—and state of the art technology, such as table-top mimeo machines, electronic stencil scanners and photocopiers. This made it possible for us to pioneer the field of mail art and more importantly, book art."[38] The press was named after P.C. Wren's novel *Beau Geste*, whose eponymous hero embarks on a transterritorial adventure.[39] Ehrenberg makes clear the group's motivations for setting up an independent press in a letter to Paul Brown, editor of the magazine *Transgravity*:

> The answer to the uniformity of the taste, to the monopolic control of culture by the artmongers (publishers, galleryowners, museum curators, critics, the whole proverbial slew of mystifiers—sic-sick) the answer, I repeat, is to set up as many possible sources, each existing within the organic limits of their own capacities and yes, even of their immediate communities' capacities.[40]

Cuauhtémoc Medina points out that "in the final analysis the goals of the founders of the Beau Geste Press were political; they rejected and discarded the filters of economic, institutional, and good taste that had been imposed on artistic production."[41] However, as well as a negative stance on the machinations of the art world, the press was concerned with creating an alternative to that system, based on the principle of self-administration. Ehrenberg stated in his 1974 introduction to *Aktual Schmuck* that "our analysis of ways to combat thought control has led us to function the way we have done for the past two years, growing not to coalesce

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38   Gilbert, "Eclectic World," 47.

39   In the novel *Beau Geste*, an English gentleman joins the French Foreign Legion to pursue a family heirloom and restore his honor. The novel's characters were revived in a 1966 film and were well-known, even notorious, when Ehrenberg arrived in London. Interestingly, the French phrase *beau geste* derives from anarchist poet Laurent Tailhade's famous response to a terrorist attack in France in 1893: "Who cares about the victims if the gesture is beautiful?" The name also combined references to the press's printing machine (a Gestetner), a wordplay on *geste* and *jest* ("the "beautiful gesture" of print and craft), as well as the implications of art as being "beautiful."

40   Quoted in Debroise and Medina, *La Era*, 158.

41   Ibid., 158. These "filters" were cultural institutions and private galleries, seen to be imposing the conversion of creativity into a marketable commodity and therefore uninterested in experimental and ephemeral activities.

but to disperse. We believe that only in coordinated dispersal can strength be achieved."[42] The idea of establishing a great number of autonomous nodes within a system of independence is based on the notion of a complete alternative system. Therefore, central to the success of the Beau Geste Press would be interaction and participation with "as many possible sources of small groups of creators" that have "something unnameable in common." The magazine *Schmuck* is exemplary in this respect. One of the key aspects of Beau Geste Press production and a legacy of Fluxshoe and other networks, through *Schmuck* the press established contacts with groups of artists, often operating collectively, in order to foster and consolidate a parallel system that could function outside of the "monopolic control of culture."[43]

THE MAGAZINE *SCHMUCK*

Published between 1972 and 1976, *Schmuck* provides a record of the connections, collaborations, and convictions of the press and reflects the strategic and pragmatic changes made during that period. *Schmuck* was an assembling magazine composed of printed multiples and object-inserts by the contributing authors and artists, and it brought together a variety of artists from a range of geographical spheres.[44] A "network of encounters and exchanges," its circulation helped disseminate new ideas about art making that were reflected in both the art presented and the essays that appeared within its pages. Independent presses were able to demonstrate, in Felipe Ehrenberg's words, "how easy and viable it is to ignore publishers and producer-galleries."[45] The publication was intimately connected with the rejection of traditional art spaces and a nonhierarchical approach to the production and consumption of art, surveying the "then

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42 Felipe Ehrenberg, "Introduction," *Aktual Schmuck* (South Cullompton: Beau Geste Press, 1974), 2.

43 Ehrenberg, quoted by Debroise and Medina, *La Era*, 158.

44 According to Stephen Perkins, "the concept of assembling is very simple, contributors submit a specific number of copies of their work to a central editor who in turn collates one copy from each artists' submissions into the final 'assembled' product, the number of artists submitting work defining the number of pages in each assembling. The presentation of the final magazine varies, some have loose covers inside of which the pages are placed, some are stapled together, others are bound and a number of others have been placed in a variety of different containers." See Stephen Perkins, "Assembling Magazines (a.k.a. Compilations)," in *The Zine and E-Zine Resource Guide* (1992), accessed April 4, 2012, http://www.zinebook.com/resource/perkins.html; and Craig Saper, "Intimate Bureaucracies & Infrastructuralism: A Networked Introduction to Assemblings," *Postmodern Culture* 7, no. 3 (May 1997).

45 Ehrenberg, "Introduction," 2.

diffuse terrain of non-conformist art, and it explicitly devoted itself to distancing itself from the 'speculative glitter' of the mainstream art world."[46]

The title, *Schmuck*, a common insult meaning "penis" in Yiddish, continued the press's taste for irreverent names, willfully contradicting the "beauty" of the "beau geste." Following the publication's editorial principle ("the magazine makes itself, not we the magazine"), Ehrenberg and Mayor allowed their Fluxus-influenced assemblage journal to be shaped by its contributors, echoing the open approach to exhibition-making adopted for Fluxshoe. *Schmuck* was not a mail art publication as such—indeed, David Mayor wrote to Taii Ashiwaza and Ikuo Shukuzawa in 1973 asking for more material for the *Japanese Schmuck*, and commenting, "I would really like to have some more 'solid' things from you than just mailed stuff, because I feel that it is difficult to print just-mail things in a magazine."[47] However, the magazine and its network did owe much to correspondence art and its networks, and this is a substantial crossover among the participating artists. Many of the themes addressed by the artists, as well as the media in which they were expressed within the pages of *Schmuck*, were also central to mail art: bureaucracy, systems, language, visual poetry, conceptual art, censorship, and politics. Moreover, Ken Friedman's correspondence networks had been crucial to the contributions to the Fluxshoe, meaning that *Schmuck* was inextricably connected to the ideas and philosophy of the movement.[48]

For the Beau Geste Press, the translocal strategy of "coordinated dispersal" was a strategic elaboration aimed at setting up an autonomous art system. The cooperative's networks were complex, deriving in part from Ehrenberg's earlier collaborations such as the Mexican Salón Independiente (Independent Salon, 1968, 1969, 1970) and *El Corno Emplumado* from Ken Friedman's extensive mail circuits, as well as from somewhat random personal connections and friendships. Some of the connections made at *El Corno Emplumado*, for example, continued to bear fruit at Langford Court, resulting in the publication of books by Cecilia Vicuña, Ulises Carrión, and Edgardo Antonio Vigo.[49] The eight editions of *Schmuck*

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46   Debroise and Medina, *La Era*, 158.

47   Letter from David Mayor to Taii Ashiwaza and Ikuo Shukuzawa, April 1973, "Schmuck etc contributions + pending + Corr w/other publishers etc + General Dead Vol 3 (12/4/74®)" Correspondence File, TGA815/3/2/4, David Mayor Collection, Tate Archive.

48   *Schmuck* was "based on an increasingly expanded network of mail interchanges by artists carried out in the tradition of La Monte Young's *An Anthology* (1961) and Maciunas' *Flux Yearboxes* (1962)." Debroise and Medina, *La Era*, 158.

49   As Ehrenberg remembers, "Beau Geste Press went on to publish more Fluxus and fluxlike things, including works like Ken Friedman's conscientious 'The Aesthetics,' Takako Saito's

were circulated internationally, but each (with the exception of two, *General Schmuck* and *General Teutonic Schmuck*) was put together by an editor from a particular country, usually a leading figure in the alternative arts scene. The editions included experimental artworks from groups of associated artists from France, Iceland, Hungary, Germany, Japan, and the former Czechoslovakia. The Beau Geste Press was "viewed by its founders as a 'link-up' among Great Britain, Latin America, and Eastern Europe."[50] However, the Press's approach to geography was not at all arbitrary. Ehrenberg's introduction to *General Schmuck* makes this clear: "We initially intended to bring out one issue per country, a nice straightforward idea (from George Maciunas), woolly enough at the edges to enable inclusion of current resident foreigners, or non-resident nationals, in my particular case, plurinationalism."[51] These comments reveal flexibility in relation to geography that undermines fixed ideas of place and nation (wherever you happened to be was where you spoke from). This was a publication that practiced internationalism through specific articulations of the local.

DEVON–BUDAPEST/DEVON–PRAGUE: *SCHMUCK* AND EASTERN EUROPE

Two editions of *Schmuck* were produced by artists working in Eastern Europe. In 1972, *Hungarian Schmuck* was published under the editorship of László Beke and Dora Maurer, and two years later *Aktual Schmuck* was published with contributions from the Czechoslovakian Aktual Group, coordinated by Milan Knížák. Both were touched by controversy. Although the artworks and ideas in these two issues of *Schmuck* did not reflect only on the political and aesthetic conditions of censorship, this context was nevertheless manifested within their covers. The crucial capacity to enact, reproduce, and distribute artistic statements was under question at all stages of publication.

    Aktual Schmuck was printed and circulated after its editor Milan Knížák had been sentenced to two years in prison for subversive activities.[52]

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wondrous productions and Ulises Carrión's sensational 'Arguments.' We produced my own and David's works, those of Opal L. Nations, Mike Nyman, Carolee Schneemann ("Parts of a Body House Book"), Genesis P. Orridge, Milan Knížák, and many, many others. We even produced Sitting Dog's methane gas producing manual which sold especially well." In White, "Fluxshoe."

50   Debroise and Medina, *La Era*, 158.

51   Felipe Ehrenberg, *General Schmuck* (South Cullompton: Beau Geste Press, 1975), 1.

52   He was jailed in 1966 and again in 1972. Knížák "holds the record for having been arrested over three hundred times between 1959 and 1989." See Kristine Siles, "Performance," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Schiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 94.

Knížák was the founder of the Aktual Group in Czechoslovakia, which since 1964 had staged happenings, events, and actions in and around Prague. In 1967 he was made "director of Fluxus East" by Maciunas. Departing somewhat from *Schmuck*'s editorial principles, *Aktual Schmuck* profiled a specific group movement rather than a broad cross section of the Czech underground. Knížák's approach to editing *Aktual Schmuck* was to create an overall design: "I was the editor and selector of everything. I made every page myself."[53] *Aktual Schmuck* was a collection of essays, photographs, texts, and instructions for actions complemented by Knížák's designs that implored the reader to "[p]aint your nails blue, make your jewellery from anything, design your own fashion." The photographs present a species of proto-punk fashion in which a comb, a key, a nail, and a safety pin are used as brooches. The documentation of actions displays an interest in rituals, the natural environment, and "barbaric" activities alongside an interest in fashion and body painting. The group's credo was defined as follows:
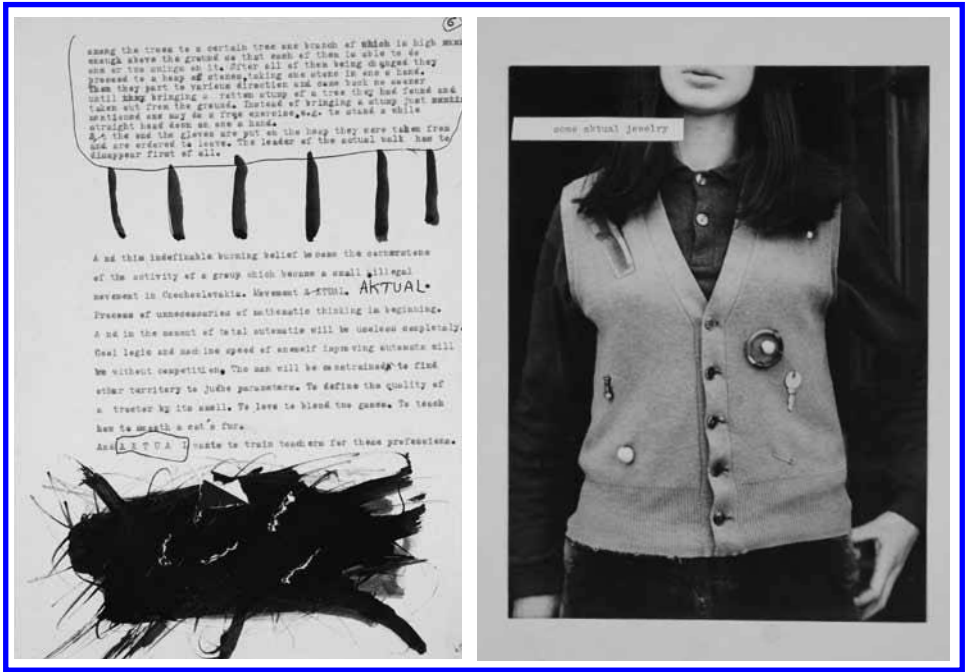
> AKTUAL
> Is a way of life
> It means we want to change all
> The things
> We touch on our way through life

The route to this change was enacted through happenings in the streets of Prague that attempted to present an alternative to the rigidity of mainstream culture, but these were precisely the kinds of activities considered undesirable by Czechoslovakian cultural policy.

Knížák's introductory essay to *Aktual Schmuck* concerns the position of artists in Czechoslovakia in relation to "international" conceptual art. Knížák's essay is typed in red but has been marked with revisions in ballpoint pen and thick black ink. The original text is covered in thickly underlined, crossed-out, and circled areas as well as arrows and repetitions of the typed text in large capital letters, which has the effect of emphasizing parts of the earlier text. The additions render the meaning unstable and partial, while at the same time aligning it with the red and black color scheme of the rest of the issue. Knížák's text is partially self-censored, with repeated "xxxx" marks over some words, oscillating between artistic

53   Milan Knížák, email message to the author, September 13, 2011.

Milan Knížák. "Introductory Essay," *Aktual Schmuck*, 1974. Tate Library Special Collections. Image courtesy of Milan Knížák.

Milan Knížák. "Some Aktual Jewelry," *Aktual Schmuck*, 1974. Tate Library Special Collections. Image courtesy of Milan Knížák.

statement and essay. A discussion of the Czechoslovakian situation fol-
lows, in which Knížák idiosyncratically explains the particularity of artistic
production in the country: "Here in CSSR [sic] appeared xxxxxx activities
known in the other world as happenings, events, actions, etc . . . but
there is a <u>big difference</u> between such activity at other countries/espe-
cially so called western countries/xxx and at CSSR [sic]."[54] Knížák's evo-
cation of the West as the "other world" makes it clear how profound the
restriction of information to and from Czechoslovakia was. Indeed, he
states: "I and also friends of mine were completely isolated, [it was] impos-
sible to do anything in public, impossible to publish. I was permanently
under police supervision."[55] In Knížák's text the idea of an almost imper-
meable border and a highly restricted amount of information about art
attests to not only an autonomous node of the system envisioned by the
Beau Geste Press but also an isolated node with an idiosyncratic approach
to conceptualism.

54   Ibid.
55   Ibid.

In 1973, the Beau Geste Press resolved to put together a seven-page document containing details of Knížák's arrest by the Czechoslovakian authorities and his subsequent sentencing in which he received two years in prison. The document was mimeographed and sent out with all the press's correspondence, reaching hundreds of their collaborators and eventually contributing to the reduction of his custodial sentence to parole. The document contained a statement by Dr. Hans Sohm, a German collector of Knížák's work who had also been arrested and interrogated by the Czech border police but was subsequently allowed to leave the country after paying a fine. Narrating the events of the morning of May 27, 1972, Sohm states, "Essentially, questions were asked about . . . the artist Milan Knížák, and his work. It was of interest to know whether the confiscated works would be exhibited, sold, or published abroad."[56] According to Sohm's statement, the main points of the charge were "attempted export of material that is intended to discredit the image of Czechoslovakia abroad and the dissemination of pornographic pictures and writing."[57] Interestingly, this capacity to reproduce and distribute information was both the reason for Knížák's arrest and, later, the means by which he obtained his freedom.

The second publication that developed the Beau Geste Press's links with and dissemination of Eastern European activities was *Hungarian Schmuck*. Organized by László Beke and Dora Maurer, it provided a broad overview of the Hungarian art scene.[58] The twenty-four artists who contributed to *Hungarian Schmuck* made a joint statement that spuriously and ironically claimed that they had withheld their permission to publish the issue, stating,

> Considering our special circumstances under which we following artists live and work as well as our experiences we have gained about the prohibiting measures taken by the supervisory authorities in our firm belief of a lack of understanding declare hereby that we do not assent to the publication and distribution of the Hungarian SCHMUCK [sic].[59]
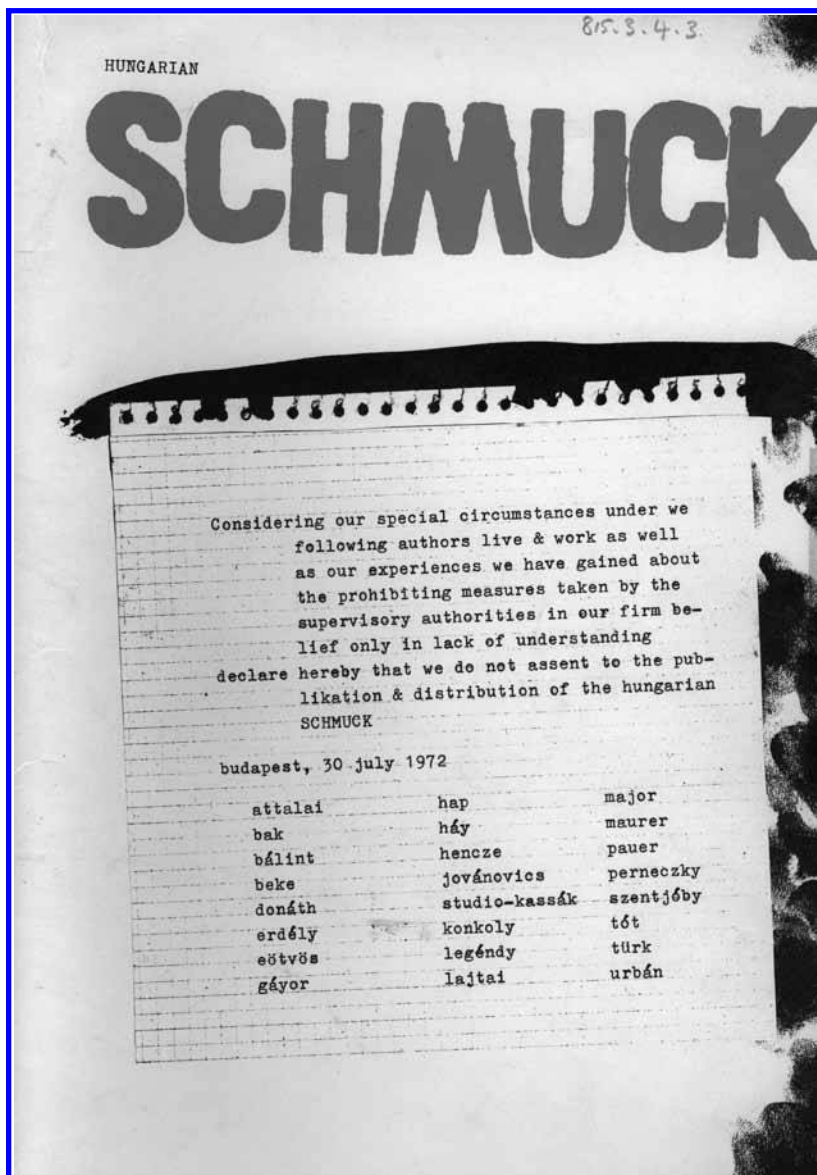
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56 *Action on Behalf of Milan Knížák* (South Cullompton: Beau Geste Press, 1973), 3.

57 Ibid., 3.

58 David Mayor met Dora Maurer through the German mail artist and art historian Klaus Groh in Oldenburg, Germany. Mayor asked Maurer to compile a Hungarian edition of *Schmuck*. Maurer had an Austrian passport and therefore was able to travel. Dora Maurer, email message to the author, December 19, 2011.

59 Dora Maurer and László Beke, *Hungarian Schmuck* (South Cullompton: Beau Geste Press, 1972).

HUNGARIAN

SCHMUCK

Considering our special circumstances under we following authors live & work as well as our experiences we have gained about the prohibiting measures taken by the supervisory authorities in our firm belief only in lack of understanding declare hereby that we do not assent to the publikation & distribution of the hungarian SCHMUCK

budapest, 30 july 1972

attalai	hap	major
bak	háy	maurer
bálint	hencze	pauer
beke	jovánovics	perneczky
donáth	studio-kassák	szentjóby
erdély	konkoly	tót
eötvös	legéndy	türk
gáyor	lajtai	urbán

Dora Maurer and László Beke. Front cover of *Hungarian Schmuck*, 1972. Tate Library Special Collections. Image courtesy of Dora Maurer.

Printed on the front cover of the issue, the statement may attest to "lack of understanding" as a deliberate strategy of obfuscation or to the "lack of understanding" of the would-be censors when confronted with their work. Artist Endre Tót recounts that censorship in Hungary was erratic in this period and did not always extend to the postal service, open-

ing up possibilities for unique lines of communication beyond local and intimate circles.[60]

The contents of these two issues of *Schmuck* demonstrate just how crucial the publication was in enabling the production and dissemination of artwork. Dora Maurer comments that the artists "were part of an alternative art scene, which was forbidden in Hungary: no exhibitions, no publicity."[61] The reproduction and distribution of the material in the form of a widely distributed magazine would have been impossible to achieve in Czechoslovakia or Hungary at the time. According to Knížák, *Aktual Schmuck* was not distributed in Czechoslovakia: "I got very few copies. . . . If they sent more they never came to me—the police were always controlling my mail."[62] László Beke explained that the art scene was very limited in Budapest as they had "neither galleries nor any art collectors," adding that "Our possibilities for exhibitions and publications are very rare. We are also aware of the momentarily general and grave period of crisis of art."[63] The crucial and contested natures of networks, contacts, circulation, and publishing are starkly apparent and serve to magnify what was at stake for the whole network: freedom of expression and information together with resistance to varied forms of censorship. The idea that those who collaborated had something "unnameable" in common refers to a collective spirit that, rather than coalescing around a fixed set of ideas—the old notion of avant-gardist revolutionary goals rejected by the ongoing project of Filliou's Eternal Network—they together espoused a set of open principles that centered on maintaining artistic activity beyond the control of the state or art market.

Conceptual methods translated well in Eastern Europe because of their flexibility and the availability of materials through which to articulate their aesthetic concerns, while also reaching a broader audience. Beke's article "'Concept' Art as the Possibility of Young Hungarian Artists" [sic] posits that in Hungary "there is no concept art in its severe and original sense" but that instead "there is a very vivid and strong tendency of young artists who have started consciously from the social and histori-

60   Tót recalls that at one time during the 1970s, "The control of the KGB was not so strong. My sending letters was scarcely controlled or not at all and because of that I could communicate very well with the western world." Klara Kemp-Welch, interview with Tót, Cologne, January 6, 2006, quoted in Kemp-Welch, "Figures of Reticence: Action and Event in East-Central European Conceptualism 1965–1989" (PhD diss., University of London, 2008), 149.

61   Maurer, email message.

62   Knížák, email message.

63   László Beke, "'Concept' Art as the Possibility of Young Hungarian Artists," in Maurer and Beke, *Hungarian Schmuck*, n.p.

cal decidedness existing in their country."[64] In their introductory essays, both Beke and Knížák are at pains to point out the impact of their specific contexts on the manifestation of conceptual art. Beke argues that while the works in *Schmuck* might look like any other conceptual work, and are not therefore stylistically particular to Hungary, they "may carry some special meaning."[65] Further stating that "we neither intend to do 'particularly' Hungarian art, nor to be characteristic," Beke points out that rather than trying to keep up with international trends, the motivations for using "new vehicles" (written texts, photographs, Xerox copies, mailings, etc.) are that they "are relatively easily available and free and flexible for us . . . with the help of these new media appearing as an international language for us we should like to give information about our particular problems and results, generally speaking about our special situation."[66] These shared values compelled translocal collaboration, but *Schmuck* also enabled artists to engage in an idiosyncratic approach to conceptualism that could respond to their own particular needs. The importance of reciprocal exchange with artists from outside Hungary is made clear in Beke's closing statement: "We send our greetings to every friend of ours who communicates with us . . . and welcome those friends of ours who will communicate with us."[67]

With a closer look at *Hungarian Schmuck*, its collaborative model can be discerned more clearly. The artworks reproduced in the publication reveal a deep concern with structuralist ideas about language as a system, a key concern for conceptualism worldwide. Endre Tót's contribution, part of his *Zero Joys* series and also known as *NOTHING AIN'T NOTHING*, explores the limits of language within a framework of communication, ironically managing to communicate through mail art and publishing, but without communicating anything (linguistically) at all. Klara Kemp-Welch explains that Tót used the mail network, "but paradoxically only in order to communicate variations on the theme of the zero."[68] Tót provides us with an interesting example of engagement with structuralist ideas on language and communication in a context of censorship. *Zero Joys* were sequences of zeros that substituted words in his letters and statements, and sometimes the zeros replaced whole sentences. In his 1971/1972 artist's book *Incomplete Informations/Verbal and Visual*, Tót writes,
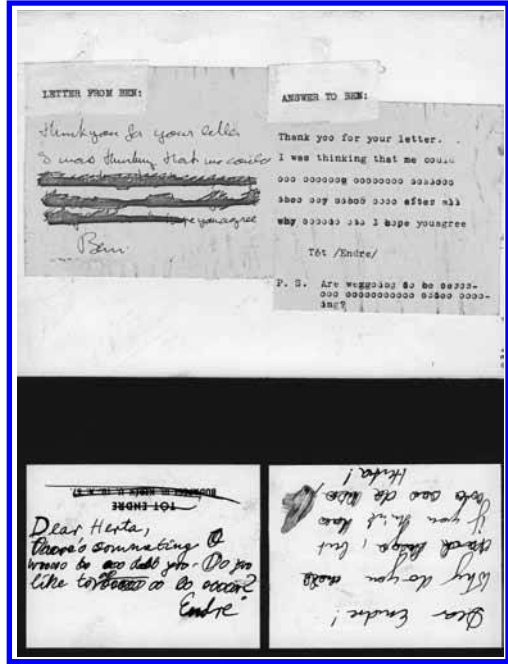
64   Ibid.
65   Ibid.
66   Ibid.
67   Ibid.
68   Kemp-Welch, "Figures of Reticence," 156.

Endre Tót. *Zero Joys*, *Hungarian Schmuck*, 1972. Tate Library Special Collections. Image courtesy of Endre Tót.

"What you don't understand write in a language that cannot be under-stood by anyone."[69] Despite the fact that he was seeking to connect and communicate through the post, Tót had developed a visual language that failed to carry explicit information. Kemp-Welch also points out that Tót's use of English as his main language of communication testifies to his desire to locate his discourse within an international field, but this self-conscious attempt is accompanied by a critique of the possibility of a shared, let alone a universal, language. However suspect Tót may have found it, having a common aesthetic language and a common artistic and ideological position did enable a degree of communication between artists across borders.

AMÉRICA LATINA: THE MISSING *SCHMUCK*

In 1973, a call for contributions to a Latin American edition of *Schmuck* was distributed by the Beau Geste Press, stating, "Our basic politics is not to make even one concession to the speculative pressures that exalt the ego and deform thought and creativity. We hope to serve as a point

69   Quoted in ibid., 150.

of information between Latin America and Europe."[70] This broad political standpoint indicates the common ground of the press's collaborators. By early 1974, a wealth of contributions had been delivered to its headquarters in Devon. That same spring, however, Ehrenberg moved back to Mexico, taking this material with him with the intention of publishing a Latin American issue under the splintered imprint of Beau Geste Press: *Libro Acción Libre*. Ehrenberg relates that by the time he settled on a small coffee farm in Xico, Veracruz, he found himself "completely unable to relate to the mathematics of European logic or Eurocentric culture,"[71] which, intriguingly, seems to have included the conceptual production of his Latin American colleagues.

Ehrenberg recalls, however, that "much spilled over" from his recent past, including the problem of the missing *Schmuck*. In 1978, Ehrenberg returned to the abandoned material: "Thanks in part to a Guggenheim award, it finally became possible to convert the Latin American material I had filed away into an impressive show . . . at the Museo Carrillo Gil in Mexico City."[72] Moreover, the National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA) printed 260,000 copies of a two-part cultural supplement that finally published the material originally intended for *Schmuck*. *Testimonios de Latinoamérica* boasted contributions from some of the region's most celebrated mail artists, conceptual artists, and writers such as Antonio Caro, Cildo Meireles, Clemente Padín, Victor Muñoz, Tunga, Regina Silveira, Harry Gamboa, and Horacio Zabala.

The first installment of *Testimonios* was released on September 20, 1978, and featured the work of seventeen artists from the region accompanied by articles by critic Néstor García Canclini and by Ehrenberg himself. Like Knížák and Beke, García Canclini and Ehrenberg weigh up conceptualism's expediency for the specific conditions of the Latin American context. García Canclini argues that conceptual strategies are relevant to Latin America insofar as they can be used to "rethink the idea of art." Accordingly, the region requires "a critique of the language used to critique society. . . . Because we cannot conceive a distinct society if we continue to perceive and represent the present with the philosophy that produced it."[73] The idea of language—aesthetic or linguistic—as a structurally determined system that could reproduce only societal inequali-

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70 *Schmuck América Latina* (1973) (V B.G.P.LXXIIIa,7EHRE), Tate Library Special Collections.

71 Felipe Ehrenberg, "Fluxus Has Always Seemed to Me to Be about Collaboration," *Fluxus Research*, Special Issue of *Lund Art Press* 2, no. 2 (1991): 21.

72 Ibid., 21.

73 Néstor García Canclini, "Art That's Not for Sale," *Testimonios de Latinoamérica*, National Institute of Fine Arts no. 42 (September 20, 1978): 3.

Testimonios de Latinoamérica, 1978. Front cover with a reproduction of a work by Waltercio
Caldas. Image courtesy of Waltercio Caldas.

ties and political crises is repeatedly addressed, as is the idea of creating
new languages, echoing the skepticism surrounding the act of commu-
nication through conventional linguistic structures expressed in the work
of Endre Tót. However, instead of addressing the limitations of communi-
cative possibilities as a result of censorship and self-censorship, the critique
focuses on communication constrained by conservative artistic practices.

The invitation to participate in a Latin American edition of *Schmuck*
presented an opportunity for artists' reflections on artistic and political
issues to reach an international forum. Horacio Zabala's contribution
testifies to the political situation in Argentina, at the same time interrogat-

ing the possibilities for art practice. The lapse of time between the material being created and its publication had seen the end of one dictatorial regime in 1973 and the establishment of a new one in 1976. Zabala's *Anteproyectos* (Pre-projects) are sinister prison designed for vanguard artists and left-wing dissidents. The structures are depicted floating in isolation in a fictional river or buried underground, while everyday street life continues above.[74] The sterile architectural design solution comments upon the political situation, in which Zabala's projects are barely even preposterous. However, in this project, closely related to Zabala's mail art project *Hoy el arte es una cárcel* (Today Art Is a Prison), carried out between 1972 and 1976, Zabala not only was criticizing the military junta but also reflecting on the position of art and the artist, of information and fiction.[75] The text accompanying the work states that "art is a pre-project," defined as "imprecise ruminations that precede more precise projects in order to arrive at a work or an action."[76] This concern with exploring the limits and possibilities of art, which is central to conceptualism, was coupled with deconstructing the systems of violence that remained invisible in the context of the Argentinean everyday.

Testimonios's concerns with semiotics, the symbolic order, and communications media are comparable to the Eastern European issues of *Schmuck*. The destabilization of linguistic processes we have seen in the work of Endre Tót and Milan Knížák is manifest in the contributions by Mario Montefiore, a Guatemalan writer living in exile in Mexico; the Colombian Gabriel García Márquez; and the Mexican artist resident in Amsterdam, Ulises Carrión, in Part Two of *Testimonios*, published a week later. Montefiore presents two works: on the left of the allotted page we find a roughly sketched portrait of the author marked "London 20/V/72." On the right side of the page a handwritten text has been carelessly scribbled out, intentionally obscuring the underlying narrative. García Márquez's contribution is a book-shaped black rectangle printed diagonally across the page, from which part of the black "cover" has been removed to reveal a small but ultimately unintelligible segment of prose. The text is partial to the point of illegibility, and so, once more, narrative is thwarted

74 Felipe Ehrenberg, "Testimonios de Latinoamérica," *Testimonios,* 5.

75 Zabala's project was an extensive investigation into this theme. He sent hundreds of preprinted forms—a convention of mail art projects—headed by the statement "Today, Art Is a Prison" and asking for responses. In 1976, the results of this collaborative work were published as a book and presented in an exhibition.

76 Horacio Zabala, text from the work reproduced in *Testimonios de Latinoamérica*, National Institute of Fine Arts no. 42 (September 20, 1978), 4.
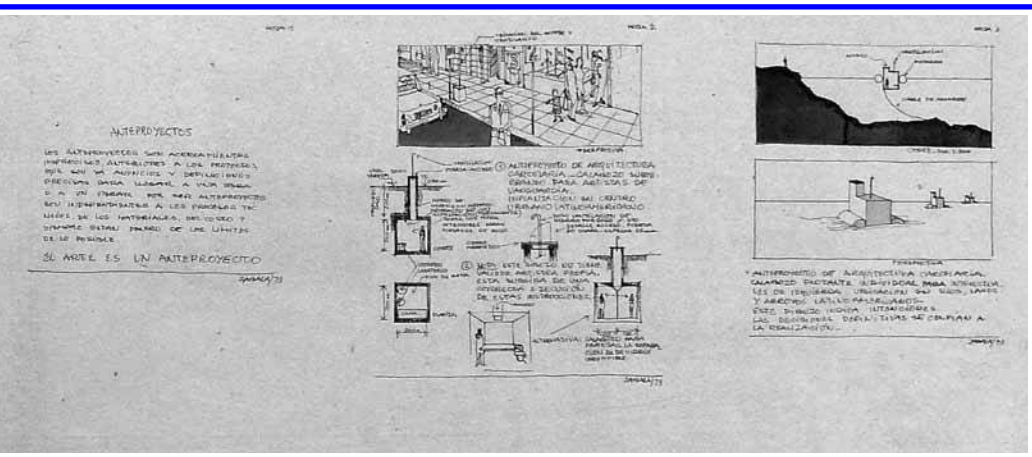
Horacio Zabala. "*Anteproyectos*/Pre-projects," 1973. Reproduced in *Testimonios de Latinoamérica*, 1978.
Image courtesy of Horacio Zabala.

and linguistic information fails to be communicated.[77] In contrast, but achieving remarkably similar ends, Ulises Carrión presents a work containing an abundance of handwritten words that ultimately fail to impart information. Originally published in the seventh issue of Carrión's magazine *Ephemera* in 1978, the piece is a catalogue of details about his social circle and the visits and whereabouts of his friends, reflecting his statement that "words cannot avoid meaning something, but they can be divested of intentionality."[78] The accumulation of banal details has an effect similar to the one achieved by the works mentioned above; in all these cases an alternative kind of communication takes the place of language. Betraying his belief in the limits of communication through language, Carrión comments, "The most beautiful and perfect book in the world is a book without any pages in the same way that the most complete language is that which lies beyond all that the words of a man can say."[79] Through the failure of the linguistic system, other codes are revealed: a "meta-message" of another order is transmitted, which enables a message about censorship to be communicated.

A second text written by Ehrenberg, reflecting on issues of language and translation, expresses his desire to locate himself within the ver-

77   In Latin American visual and concrete poetry circles, modernist attitudes toward language, such as the rejection of narrative as essentially bourgeois, had previously been thoroughly explored.

78   Ulises Carrión, "The New Art of Making Books," *Kontexts* nos. 6–7 (1978): 173.

79   Ibid., 173.

nacular culture of Mexico. Ehrenberg meditates on the subtleties and imperatives of cultural translation, musing,

> The reader may question the use of languages that are foreign to the Latin American continent; but facing the repression, facing the lack of resources, facing the necessity to enrich their experiences, the artist emigrates, travels. In exile and in his desire to communicate, he often adopts—while temporarily—the languages of a society that receives him. Other times, and exactly to overcome the inherent limitations of such a language (theirs or foreign), the creator invents their own alphabets.[80]

Ehrenberg's conflation of artistic and verbal language testifies to a sense of shared experience of emigration, dictatorship, lack of resources, and the desire to communicate. However, in this case—as distinct from the *Schmuck* anthologies produced in Eastern Europe—the varied localities come to reflect shared values, a pan–Latin American solidarity between two points. Like Knížák and Beke, Ehrenberg is extremely aware of the relation between "alien" artistic languages and the local context; yet a third position is also proposed: in order to overcome the limitations of either local or foreign languages, the artist invents a new language according to his or her own needs. Conceptualism, for Ehrenberg, seems to oscillate between an alien aesthetic language, a language through which he could connect with other artists across borders, and a flexible tool with which to invent new languages. Like the principle of the open network, conceptual methods were by definition open to reinvention.

Although the material originally intended for *Schmuck* did not change with its metamorphosis into *Testimonios de Latinoamérica*, the audience it reached did. The publication was distributed through Mexico's system of daily newspaper circulation—reaching a broad public—rather than through Beau Geste Press's worldwide artists' networks. Ehrenberg saw this as a fitting way for the works to circulate; the newspaper was thoroughly removed from "aestheticized" elite art publications: "This type of production achieves an almost total escape from the mercantile structures that condition artistic production in Latin America."[81] This change had to do with Ehrenberg's misgivings about his own position as a Mexican artist who had emigrated and returned. Although the change in strategy

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80 Ehrenberg, "Testimonios," 2.
81 Ibid., 2.

was somewhat pragmatic, Ehrenberg's move and the Mexican National Institute of the Fine Arts agreement to back the show was what precipitated it, what it really shows is the flexibility of the networking model pursued by the Beau Geste Press, and the Press's dedication to publishing—to *making public*—artistic endeavors across borders.

FACETS OF TRANSLOCALITY

What all these translocal nodes had in common was "unnameable" because it was not a programmatic ideological connection or set of goals. Instead, artists took on a broad ideological position against global capitalism: a commitment to furthering the cultural and political gains of 1960s and 1970s counterculture, the promotion of artistic freedoms, and an experimental outlook that was more concerned with process, ideas, and systems than with sending objects to market. Translocalism had a particular significance in politically oppressive climates: as a means of escape, especially considering that the work in some cases acted as a wishful proxy for the body. Dora Maurer describes the effect of *Hungarian Schmuck* as "fresh air" and a "mental support" for artists.[82] In some ways, translocal communication might be thought of as one locality temporarily traveling into another in the form of the mailed artifact. This breach, however tiny, enables the establishment of an alternative artistic economy based on gift exchange, and contrasts with the immediate reality that one experiences. This notion corresponds with the fact that the artists wished for their experiences to be known in other contexts. The Aktual Group's desire to enact a futurist-style total aesthetic stands as a direct response to an overtly controlled public sphere, and the ability to collaborate translocally enabled their alternative vision to become a reality in print, if not in Czechoslovakia itself. *Testimonios de Latinoamérica* also published material that could not have circulated in the countries where the works originated; as such, the translocal functions as a transference of a moment and a context to a different one.

What is the significance of these ad hoc networking structures—a press based in England, co-run by a Mexican artist, with international visitors, printing a magazine produced in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Japan, or Iceland—for how we write about and try to understand circulatory cross-border practices? Networks such as these prove resistant to explanation and definition when we employ cartographic approaches to art history ("Latin American" or "Eastern European" art), or notions of center

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82   Maurer, email message.

and periphery. Art that is in flux by definition resists attempts to locate it, if to locate a work of art is to place it within a period, a context, or a set of geographical coordinates. Magazines like *Schmuck* and other networking models, such as mail art, suspend the cartographic, temporal, and spatial operatives that usually govern the historicization of artistic production. Circulatory practices refuse to settle comfortably: in their flights and voyages they defy the gravity of art historical methods, demanding that we continue to think.[83] This demand happens not only because networked art challenges common assumptions about what constitutes art—the categories of object, author, and materiality—but also because it questions how we try to understand, record, archive, and organize knowledge. The continuation of thought that is provoked by mail art's productive and antagonistic tensions is a condition that continues to permeate its historicization in exhibitions, publications, and museum practice.

The rejection of geographical boundaries as the primary means of defining the parameters of artistic production is a first step toward understanding the dynamics, nuances, and complexities of this period. Networking practices and their international scope demonstrate the dialectical rather than oppositional nature of Latin American and Eastern European contacts with the rest of the world, nullifying in the process the geography-based category of ideological conceptualism. Translocal artistic strategies encourage an art historical approach that encompasses varied genealogies and interdisciplinary thought (communications theory, cybernetics, systems and media theory, as well as philosophy and anthropology), the rapid exchange of ideas, and the decentralization of artistic practice.

Mail art's unique contribution, as a broadly defined conceptual practice, lies in the fact that artists were able to take part in a global movement that was ideologically motivated in the broadest sense because the principle of "openness" was not to be sacrificed to programmatic goals. For this reason, the Beau Geste Press decided to leave the common ground between artists unnamed.[84] In the networked 1970s, artists were counterhegemonic mostly in spirit; however, the translocal networks examined here did enunciate at least some of their goals. In their pursuit of freedom of artistic expression, mail artists created a space in which censorship (whether inflicted by the art market or the state) could be contested.

83   Mauricio Marcin, "Arte Correo en un libro," insert in *Arte Correo*, ed. Mauricio Marcin (Mexico City: Museo de la Ciudad, 2011), 12.
84   For twenty-first-century practice, Maja and Reuben Fowkes sum up this political standpoint as being "in the spirit of counter-globalisation rather than corporate globalism."

The "open" ideology mentioned above relates directly to Filliou's proposition of an ongoing festival of communication: his Eternal Network. The model goes beyond the programmatic goals of the avant-garde to promote dialogic, rather than one-way, communication. The importance of the Beau Geste Press lies in the fact that it enabled and made visible connections artists felt with colleagues and friends in other locations, a spirit expressed by Beau Geste Press collaborator Cecilia Vicuña: "We didn't have the sense that this is Argentina, this is Chile, this the border, that is Europe; we had the feeling . . . there was a humanity searching for itself."[85] The artist Paulo Bruscky goes further, stating that the network "managed to end the idea of nationality in the arts."[86] On the basis of this counterhegemonic spirit artists were able to explore the political realities in their respective countries, while at the same time acting within a flexible global network of communication. While a degree a cynicism was maintained concerning conceptual art as an imported "Western" artistic language, and indeed concerning the possibility of communication altogether, translocal networking practices did carry with them an implicit critique that originated in marginal or postcolonial sites. In networked art *all* artistic manifestations are local, whether they occur in San Francisco, Devon, Mexico City, La Plata, or New York City.
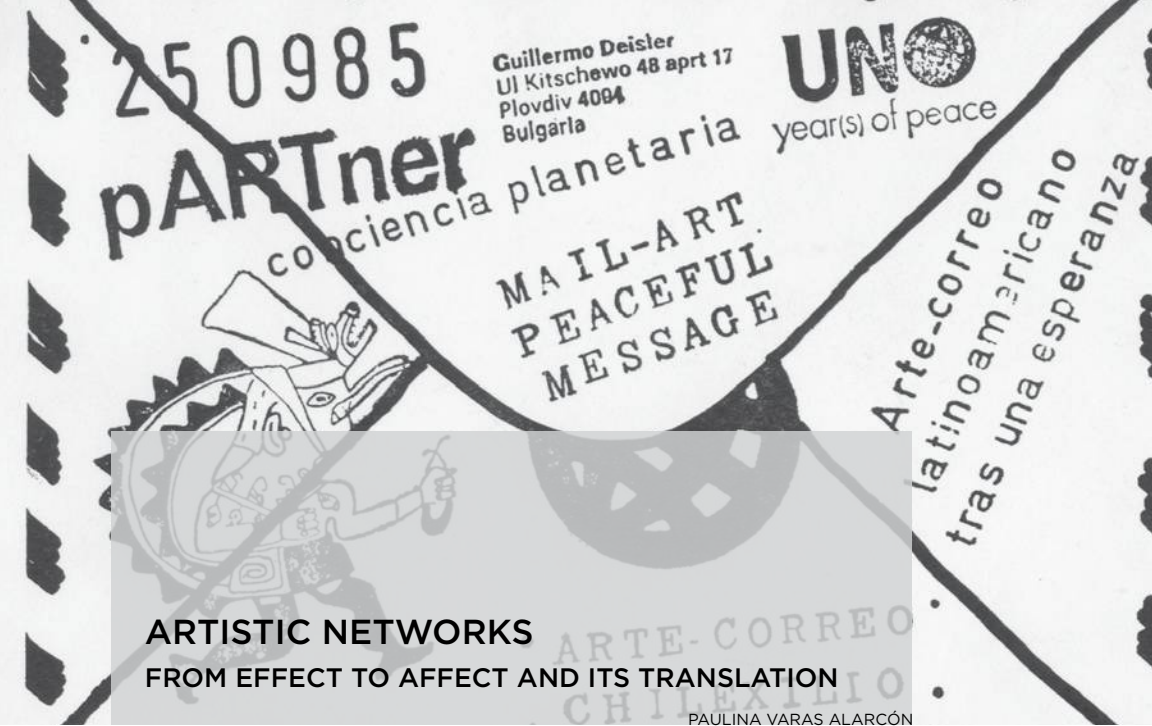
85   Valerie Fraser, "Interview with Cecilia Vicuña," January 4, 2011, Santiago, Chile, unpublished.
86   Paulo Bruscky in *As Aventuras de Paulo Bruscky,* dir. Gabriel Mascaro (DVD, 2010).

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ARTISTIC NETWORKS
FROM EFFECT TO AFFECT AND ITS TRANSLATION

PAULINA VARAS ALARCÓN

(1)   forming a network

(2)   getting into the network

(3)   offering and receiving, giving feedback to the circuit

GUILLERMO DEISLER

At the end of the 1970s in the city of Plovdiv, Bulgaria, the Chilean artist Guillermo Deisler asked a question and created a visual poem to accompany it.[1] It consisted of the word "THE" written once in very large letters over the word "us" written fifty times. Whenever I have thought of the title or the text of this piece, I thought of the "us" as a question. Perhaps it was a little manifesto by the artist, sent from exile and from another territory, and evoking some kind of lost collectivity, suspended in time and propelled by the poetics of the place. Today we can review this action based on two factors: the mail art network as a geography of language, and the letter as a series of trajectories and territories of translation.

The recent exposition Alternative Networks proposed a certain relationship between the spatiotemporal trajectories that supported Latin

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[1]   Guillermo Deisler (1940–95), artist, engraver, editor, set designer, poet, and mail artist. Deisler was born in Santiago de Chile and died in Halle, Germany, where he resided after his political exile.
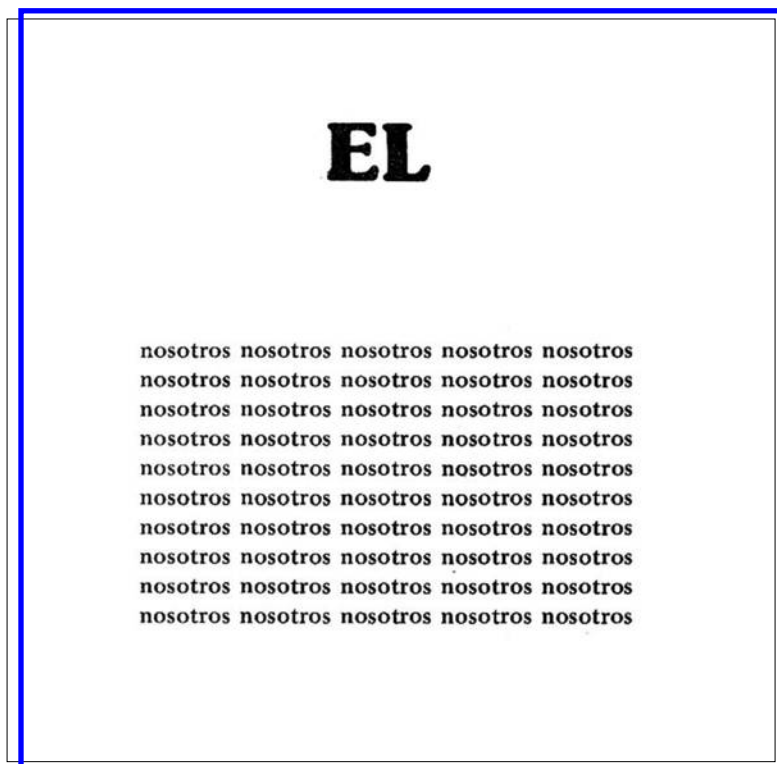
Guillermo Deisler. *El nosotros*, 1985. Visual poem offset printing, 6 × 6 cm. Archive Guillermo Deisler, Santiago de Chile. Image courtesy of Laura Coll.

American and Eastern European artists.[2] What these artists had in common was that they proposed escape routes from the censorship and repression imposed by the dictatorships of the 1960s and 1970s: "The relationship between the artists of Eastern Europe and Hispanic America highlights the situation that existed at that time. The transversal South-Eastern axis was consolidating its ties beyond the political poles and dominant ideologies."[3] An example of this was the information network that was generated by using the postal service based on the deferred presence of the sender. This was complemented by other forms of supportive exchange that involved personal trips for the delivery of shipments, or even the actual presence of the sender, who handed a package over by hand.

2   Exhibition at the Contemporary Art Museum at the Universidad de São Paulo in June 2011 (Cristina Freire, curator).

3   Cristina Freire, "Clemente Padín—Palabra, acción y riesgo," in *Clemente Padín: Word, Action and Risk* (Bremen: Weserburg Studienzentrum für Künstlerpublikationen, 2010), 24.

The people who created the mail art network often did not know each other personally, but they nevertheless established an intense and emotional relationship based on the presence or absence of their bodies, which allowed for the emergence of a different way of understanding the relationship between political subjectivity and its physical representation:

> The simultaneity of this search for communication between experimenters in art and poetry on other continents and in different corners of the globe is already an undisputed fact. . . . The internationalization of the search for contacts, publics, readers, and spectators for this mail art began to indirectly influence its creators who began to experiment with messages that one could read without any language barriers—a return to sign systems that allowed for direct reading. In this sense the visual began to concern them from then on.[4]

In the special case of the artist Guillermo Deisler, his epistolary operations and visual language amplify the hermeneutic vision of sending and return that characterizes the postal system on a daily basis. The act of receiving implicitly preserves the act of sending and undoubtedly considers the translation of a received object or letter to be fundamental. The act of translating spaces and fictions with multiple languages and meanings in a poetic-visual key inscribes the idea of transfiguration insofar as it multiplies the deferred meaning. This refers not only to the translation of languages, since this type of "absence of languages" chooses a body as catalyst and "an organizational structure in a state of evolution."[5] Such an idea of translation is vital for activating meaning in the new context where the letter's content unfolds. Here I would like to propose that the system of mail art works like a body of linked, reverberant, contaminated, and affective trajectories that are at the same time atemporal and physically displaced.

TRANSLATION

Mail art produces a relationship across trajectories that generate systems of communal affect. The journey of the artworks as well as their reproducibility and loss of origin are strategically visualized in this postal con-

4   Guillermo Deisler, unpublished manuscript.
5   Susan Kelly, "The Transversal and the Invisible: How Do You Really Make a Work of Art That Is Not a Work of Art?" accessed April 4, 2012, http://republicart.net/disc/mundial/kelly01_en.htm.

text by means of a "collecting of places" and by means of the expulsion of what is in circulation. Guillermo Deisler, Clemente Padín, Edgardo Vigo, Wladimir Dias-Pino, and Álvaro and Neidé de Sá regularly used the state postal service for sending their visual material, but there was also an intense network of relationships built for and with travelers who carried the letters and materials in their baggage in order to hand them over to others once they arrived at their destination, including even the direct presence of the sender at the recipient's house with the letter in hand. The suggestion by the artist Ulises Carrión of the "Sistema Internacional de Arte Correo Errático (SIACE)" (International System of Erratic Mail Art)[6] for an "alternative to the official post offices" (1977) gave rise to other possibilities of transmitting messages at the margins of the established system, inventing in the process new forms of exchange: "The message should be sent to the SIACE office by any method except the official postal service. It can be delivered by the author or by anyone else. . . . By using SIACE, you are contributing to the only alternative to the national bureaucracies and you are strengthening the international community of artists."[7] The urgent necessity to create new forms of exchange not only was due to the expansion of the art system for an established community, but it also represented a sort of questioning of communication systems in a political context. The machineries of repression of the dictatorships in Latin America and Eastern Europe were unable to control the large quantity of mail that passed through the territories under their control. In this way a kind of gap opened through which letters and shipments could slip uncontrolled. For those artists in the network who, like Guillermo Deisler, lived in political exile, this took on the value of a kind of "epistolary survival":

> For Latin Americans—and there are already many creative people who like me have been forced into exile either voluntarily or through political circumstances—"art by mail" becomes the palliative that neutralizes our situation as "deceased citizens," as the Paraguayan writer Augusto Roa Bastos called this massive emigration of cultural workers from the South American continent.[8]

6   Ulises Carrión, "Sistema Internacional de Arte Correo Errático. Una alternativa a las Oficinas de Correo oficiales," in *Arte Correo* (exhibition catalogue), ed. Mauricio Macin (Amsterdam, 1977; repr., Museo de la Ciudad de México, 2011), 246.
7   Ibid., 246.
8   Deisler, unpublished manuscript.

Guillermo Deisler. *Chile vencerá. Exposición del artista chileno exiliado: Guillermo Deisler*, 1986. Poster about the exhibition, 15 × 25 cm. Archive Guillermo Deisler, Santiago de Chile. Image courtesy of Laura Coll.

These collaborative networks were very effective, and they gave rise to ways of creating art that activated spaces that salon art never occupied. The system proposed a relational way of production that was mindful of the distribution of objects, poems, letters, or drawings that had the capacity to transform and that functioned in their turn as crucibles for critique. They fulfilled this function by acting transversally between art and everyday life, an issue that today permits us not only to rethink what is being distributed as art, but also to recognize the different layers of semiotic reading and innovative techniques designed to produce new objects of exchange that would be closer to their potential translation as a system of registration or a cartography of simultaneities and cultural shifts.

The mass media of communication and their focus on individual consumption was one of the principal targets for mail art. By spreading counterinformation, mail art exposed and ironized the way in which people were being manipulated, prevented from thinking autonomously, and transformed into subjects that were easy to control. Therefore, the signs used in mail art networks under the logic of "visual poetry" were characterized by the demand for emancipation and communication that passed through the order of signs in order to transform them into new forms for the activation of poetic-political contents.

Circulation brought with it responsibility to the extent that it entailed a type of collective creation that was foreign to the official art circuit. As such it fostered specific forms of collaboration and solidarity, as in the case of the Uruguayan artist Clemente Padín, who besides being arrested by the Uruguayan security forces during the last military dictatorship, also had many of his books and his personal archives taken away by a regime that controlled bodies as much as their daily memories. One way to recover the confiscated material was through the collaboration of those people who received Padín's mail during the period prior to his arrest. The mail art network here functioned as a depository of shared responsibilities; the postal system's connectivity in its turn became inseparable from its own memory and its history of transformation; it became connected with the tasks of the postal system, producing "correlated activity."[9]

It is also important to point out that Padín's freedom was gained thanks to an international movement made up of a variety of different groups, some of them members of the mail art network who fought for the artist's freedom from the outside: "The idea of a unique, authentic

9   Francisco Varela, *Conocer. Las ciencias cognitivas: Tendencias y perspectivas. Cartografía de las ideas actuales* (Barcelona: Gedisa, 2005), 53.

Guillermo Deisler. *El mundo: Un objeto salido de la órbita del uso social.* Postcard silkscreen, 10 × 15 cm. Archive Guillermo Deisler, Santiago de Chile. Image courtesy of Laura Coll.

and original artwork is meaningless in the universe of exchange. And the distinction between original and copy turns out to be obsolete, regardless of the interests of an art market that stubbornly wants to save this type of conceptual production."[10]

It is possible then to think of the network of mail art as an extension of the body beyond its physical limitations. We may wonder in what the political subjectivity constructed by the mail art network consists, putting aside its institutionalization beginning in the 1980s by museums and private collections that paid attention to its products, but not necessarily to the way in which mail art disrupted the established artistic, political, and social circuits. Today this tendency represents a task that needs to be critically addressed and investigated.

One common characteristic of many of the artists in the mail art network was their participation in publishing platforms, many of them created by the artists themselves and distinguished from industrial publishing by the fact that their editions were handmade, opening themselves up to new voices that were not necessarily part of the official system. An example of this is the folder called UNI/vers(;), developed by Guillermo Deisler from 1987 to 1995 from his home in Halle (Germany) where he invited

10   Freire, "Clemente Padín," 25.

Guillermo Deisler. *mail-art peaceful message.* Postcard offset printing, 10 × 15 cm. Archive Guillermo Deisler, Santiago de Chile. Image courtesy of Laura Coll.

many mail art artists: "The periodic character of the publication forced the editor to design a model of self management that would permit the project's survival over time"[11]—and, I might add, give a sustainable objective to his initial ideas regarding the "Peace Dream Project" (this was the subtitle of all the files). UNI/vers(;) and the large quantity of mail that was being distributed by Deisler was a tactic for the exchange and distribution of content, as well as a new strategy for inserting oneself into the ideological circuits; it was a way of influencing politics and of accompanying a collective process of contestation and co-construction oriented toward the future.

Today it is necessary to identify what it is that—recognizing the different forms of collaboration in the mail art network—permits us to think of a distribution of experience that does not remain attached to objects alone but that is linked instead to exchanges of moments, affects, preoccupations, political postures, and collective desires that are being anticipated in the correspondence. The stories and collections that following our archive fever we revisit today erase any fixed image of mail art because our mobility prevents us from entering canonical history in a

11   Paulina Varas and Francisca García, "Guillermo Deisler: Redes, textualidades y cuerpos gráficos," unpublished manuscript.

homogenous way. The "mail art network" system can no longer be represented in two dimensions like traced trajectories on a map. Rather, these trajectories should be thought of in three dimensions, as lines of flight that originate in territories and even in the language of art itself, whose operations and internal practices go beyond the system of relations that we imagine. In that sense, no archive of mail art could be complete, since in this system of correspondences each object or letter mirrors another place.

LANGUAGE AS A GEOGRAPHY OF THE SOUTH

Sooner or later
we noticed . . . that it is impossible to reclaim and represent
mail art;
we understood that each piece of mail nourished the network
and with each piece the network changed. The network, one might
think, is infinite.[12]

The mail art network can be thought of as an organic and dialogic entity. That is to say that it cannot be mapped statically, since its form is mobile. In our time this gives rise to the question of how and where the networks of artistic collaboration are positioned. To what degree do they occupy places in space, expand, contract, manifest their flexibility? How do they disperse the center-periphery dialectic that the networks of mail art displace based on the collection of places? One concept that can determine collective cross-relations could be referred to as "translating ourselves"—an operation that we could find suitable for this particular dialogue. However, in this entire process there are also plenty of residual elements and surpluses, as Nelly Richard points out: "The 'Southern' rhythm should fill the texts of culture from the Latin American periphery with roughness and dissonance, so that a refracted mark—negativity, excess, remainders, impurities—may oppose the relativistic discourse of cultural assimilation."[13]

Richard problematizes the translation of the idea of the "South" by recalling James Clifford and his notion of "imperfect translations" in order to avoid the homogenization or neutralization of the emancipatory potentialities of that "imperfect" place where the experience of difference

12   Macin, *Arte Correo*, 11.
13   Nelly Richard, "Derivaciones periféricas en torno a lo intersticial. Alrededor de la noción de 'Sur,'" in *Revista Ramona*, no. 91 (June 2009): 26.

takes refuge in order to protect itself. Therefore the cadence or rhythm of what remains to be called "South" seems to turn on its local dimension, announcing its context as an untranslatable experience.

Undoubtedly, to enunciate the notion of periphery or rather to displace its critical condensation from the point of view of geopolitics is a critical task that has long since been assumed by mail artists, among others. Today we wonder about the significance of the "local" in a context where the globalization of subjectivity—built with economic models of devalued signs—erases markings and silences the collective choirs of those who emancipate themselves through the gaps that have been wrested away from the control of cognitive capitalism.

What would "the South" be in the context of "the local"? It would be that "juncture and decentralization" of which Richard writes in a recent text in which she assures us that "South is the in-between place that displays the traces of its Latin American creation and its cultural-historic relevance; yet at the same time it produces mismatches so that what is split or deviant in its sub-locations may find shelter from the narratives of full integration within a continental frame of reference."[14] If we observe the contemporary productions in what we call "the South," we recognize a series of movements inside this space—or, as Richard calls it, this "in-between space"—as these organic spaces and dialogic fictions begin to translate the idea of the network into a series of actions, operations, or spaces that permit us to think and construct a residence in an interstice where "the pre-existence of an I is no longer a referential sign but an erosion of experience."[15] As experience and the practice of subjectivity become connected through educational initiatives by means of which collectives or local groups become empowered, they are capable of translating context while at the same time mobilizing body and speech. This leads toward the desire for oneself and for the Other in order to interpret and "choreograph oneself,"[16] based on those means and procedures that are different at certain moments, and that appear to be similar in others.

The network experience calls us toward exchange and the language of the Other, it appeals for translation, and it demands our capacity to

14   Ibid., 28.

15   José Llano, "La notación del intérprete. La construcción de un paisaje socio-cultural a través de la experiencia como huella material en Valparaíso," accessed, April 4, 2012, http://www .cracvalparaiso.org/?p=1049.

16   Brian Holmes, "The Potential Personality," accessed, April 4, 2012, http://www.springerin .at/dyn/heft_text.php?textid=1671&lang=en.

Pau Faus and Claudio Astudillo, *Co-habitaciones*, 2010. Art intervention in public space. CRAC Valparaíso, Chile. Image courtesy of the artists. Photo by Pau Faus.

translate ourselves within that specific event in time and space we call "residence." To situate someone who has a place of residence means to adopt a location, so that the discourse and its practices are viewed as strategies that persistently require the recipient to be involved and to be part of the collective experience. This is how we can identify projects in relation to the way they distribute experience, and to the production of affections within the economy of solidarity that has developed in the context of a network of autonomous and independent spaces.

Why is "autonomy" a factor or a tool for speaking of network? The social spaces that are being generated through "residing in the other" always represent a form of exchange; "there is no neutral administration or pedagogical projects"[17] since the reformulation or redistribution of this collective experience always feeds back into knowledge. The creation of learning communities presupposes spaces for negotiation and collective production, but it also provides for the production of a continuous network of collaboration and types of knowledge that multiply signification, questioning participation and pedagogy as forms of cultural production and producing a new form for communicating and imagining on the basis of what is called "a place."

An example of this is the recent experience of exchanges involving independent art spaces in Latin America and Spain that have generated

17   Paulo Freire, *La educación en la ciudad* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 2007), 48.

a series of residencies that seek to activate ways of sharing knowledge, cultural management, affects, and resources:

> *Residencies in the Network* . . . is a Spanish-Latin American platform of spaces for the investigation, production and exhibition of art and contemporary culture that are linked basically through their residency programs. The network brings together different residency formats. . . . It is made up of private and mixed (public/private) initiatives, with a whole range of administrative and legal structures. The network was created in 2008 as a result of the desire for Latin American integration and of an affective desire for community and joint work between its members, so that through this they might gain representation and dialogue at both the micro and the macro level of international cultural politics.[18]

Some of the projects carried out through the Network since 2008 are the "editorial residency" where "El Levante" from Rosario, Argentina, and "Oficina #1" (Office #1) from Caracas, Venezuela, were conceived in order to publish "Entre" (Between), which will systematize information concerning a series of exchanges that took place between 2008 and 2009, based on the residency of the editor Miren Eraso. Eraso proposed this publication as a tool for action and interaction. The publication includes results and reflections about projects such as the "Expanded Residency" set up jointly by CRAC and Can Xalant of Barcelona, based on an investigation of large cultural projects in Caracas and Barcelona and of the dangers of speculation in the sphere of culture; a management residency between "Lugar a Dudas" from Cali and "FAC" from Montevideo; and another between "Lugar a Dudas" and "Can Xalant" in which cultural administrators exchanged their expertise in order to understand how to build relationships inside and out of each space; an archive-related residency between CRAC and Casa13 from Córdoba where an artist was invited to investigate the possibilities for visualizing the archives of Casa13, opening them to the city's public; and finally the project "Frontera compartida" (Shared Border), which was organized by Ceroinspiración, Casa Tres Patios, and Escuelab, involving a temporary community for work and geographic exploration near the border between Peru and Ecuador that produced a publication and a video about the experience.

18   See http://residenciasenred.org/, accessed April 4, 2012.

Many other projects have developed in relation to these diverse ways of intertwining cultural production with possibilities for cultural management and production that involve strengthening the bonds of cooperation. Without a doubt, one current challenge for the Network's functioning is the idea of "autonomy" that might develop, suggesting a model of cultural development that encourages the independence of every project and its management. It was for this reason that in 2011 a management and mediation residency was organized with the financial support of AECID.[19] The idea was that one person would take on the role of mediator within those areas that were defined and deemed crucial for the internal functioning of this network: Management, Projects, and Communication. Together with this, there was a proposal to systematize information based on a project that would identify the management and knowledge production models for each space, as well as evolving methodologies for participation that might be key to the conception of new forms of social and economic organization in cultural politics, both on a local and a regional level.

One of the future challenges is the possibility of decentralizing the territories of a South that is no longer thought of geopolitically but rather epistemologically, allowing us to establish relationships between shifting regions on the basis of more complex trajectories modeled on subjective and collective desires, and determined by forms of transference that have an impact on daily life and its economies and that refer to politics by mobilizing modifications and accelerations in local geographies. At this point the question arises whether on the map of contemporary artistic practice there is a geography for what is collective. If emphasis has already been placed on the need for the global discourses to give way to a series of minorities without representation or central legitimacy—even if resistance evokes a variety of dissimilar options—we have to ask: where can we deposit our desires derived from untranslatable places so we can confirm that our desire for collective articulation is possible? In more concrete terms, where do we translate ourselves collectively?

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19   This economic support involves the costs of this and other network projects, although each of the network's spaces has independent funding from different public and private sources. This specific initiative required money for lodging, airfare, production, and organization. The agreement was carried out with the support of the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation for Development through a network project by the Spanish Cultural Centers in São Paulo (Brazil), Lima (Perú), Montevideo (Uruguay), and Buenos Aires, Córdoba y Rosario (Argentina).
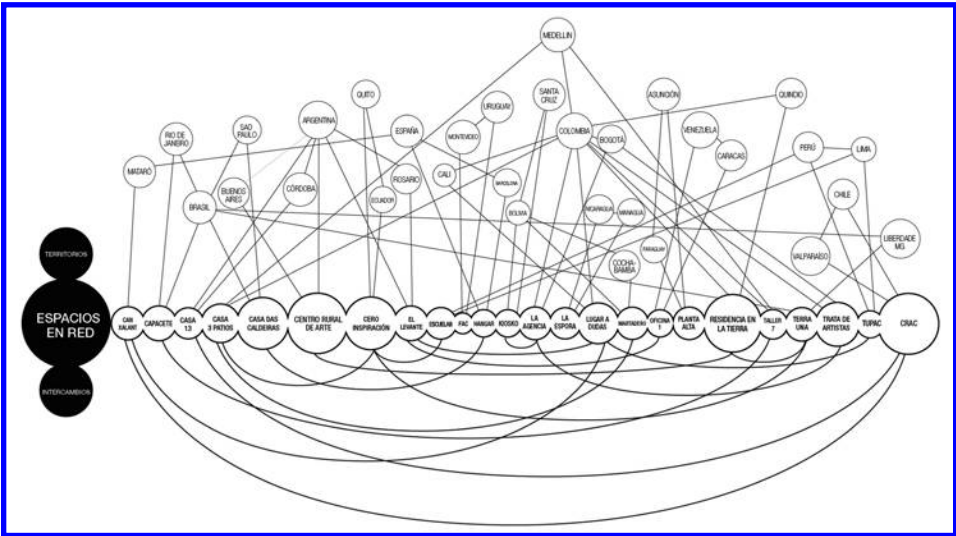
Manuel Carrión and CRAC Valparaíso. *Red de redes,* 2011. CRAC Valparaíso, Chile. Image courtesy of CRAC Valparaíso.

We might construct a moment and a narrative where dissent and opposition to totalitarian definitions reverberate with what reactivates itself every so often. This reactivation emerges from a series of articulations and crossovers as well as the cooperative, decentralized, and autonomous working networks where we can locate self-translation as a new potentiality and emancipatory energy with respect to our genealogies and memories.

TRANSLATED BY SVEN SPIEKER

INTERNATIONAL HUNGARY!
GYÖRGY GALÁNTAI'S NETWORKING STRATEGIES

JASMINA TUMBAS

INTRODUCTION

> Living in Eastern Europe meant being constantly prepared for
> defeat and backwardness but also to question what it is to be human.
> There was no real dictator, only a long line of downtrodden individu-
> als, each imagining that everyone in front of them was an informer
> and everyone behind them a reckless anarchist. But once informing
> has become common currency—and the informer a model citizen
> —what is left to inform about? Where is the truth whereby we can
> recognize the liar?
>
> GYÖRGY KONRÁD, *A GUEST IN MY OWN COUNTRY*

In his memoir of Eastern Europe, György Konrád, the Hungarian novelist,
intellectual, and dissident, laid bare the effect of the omniscient collective

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gaze, abetted by the omnipresent surveillance mechanisms of state socialism, that invaded the private lives of citizens and imbued everyday relationships with mistrust and paranoia. This fear of the state was cemented in 1956, when Soviet tanks crushed the Hungarian revolution, for it "meant a clear, unconditional recognition of the global power position of Moscow and Soviet Supremacy in Central and Eastern Europe."[1] Reflecting on her experience in Hungary, psychiatrist Eva Katona stated, "A society which tends to punish independent dissent and conflict tends to produce two types of psychological adaptation: One is submission to autocratic power (abdication of responsibility) while the second is a kind of laissez-faire attitude towards political and social phenomena beyond one's control (disavowal of responsibility)."[2] She suggests that this "disavowal of responsibility" is what leads to "organized irresponsibility."[3] The abdication of personal responsibilities characterizes many citizens who live under the traumatizing leadership of authoritarian regimes, but some form of resistance is also ubiquitous in every dictatorial regime.[4]

In *A Carnival of Revolution*, Padraic Kenney offers a rich and detailed discussion of some of the social movements in Central Europe that resisted "organized irresponsibility," fueling the democratic opposition and paving a road of resistance that led to the events of 1989. As many have understood, Kenney affirms that 1989 was not a moment of revolution without a foundation, but rather the manifestation of the concrete efforts of social movements that educated people about democratic processes.[5] "There are no miraculous events here, but many years of concerted action. The actors are not famous dissident intellectuals and the ruthless communists, but hundreds of lesser known individuals."[6] While Kenney's book is considered to have pioneered the discussion of lesser-known but seminal movements that brought democratic change in socialist societies, the contribution to social transformation by artistic communities is often omitted in such scholarly discussions.

1   Lóránd Hegyi, "Hungarian Art of the Eighties—Art in Transition: From Reform Communism to Political Changes," in *Aspects/Positions: 50 Years of Art in Central Europe 1949–1999*, ed. Lóránd Hegyi, Dunja Blažerić, and Bojana Pejié (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, 1999), 267.

2   Nora Csiszer and Eva Katona, "Hungary: Replacing a Missing Stone," in *Beyond Invisible Walls: The Psychological Legacy of Soviet Trauma, East European Therapists and Their Patients*, ed. Jacob D. Lindy and Robert Jay Lifton (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2001), 38.

3   Ibid., 39.

4   My dissertation examines closely the role of sovereignty and trauma in Eastern European art, but the etiology of trauma requires too much explanation to go into in detail in this essay.

5   Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 13.

6   Ibid., 16.

This essay considers some of the cultural interventions by the Hungarian artist György Galántai, focusing on his art activities from 1970 onward, events and exhibitions that anticipated and prefigured societal change associated with the political events of 1989. I begin with his transformation of an abandoned chapel into an exhibition space for experimental art in 1970: the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio located in the lakeside city of Balatonboglár in the west of Hungary. I then turn to Artpool, the now internationally renowned archive of experimental art that he and writer, editor, and curator Julia Klaniczay amassed from 1979 until today. After the state shut down the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio in 1973, Artpool served as Galántai's vehicle for distributing samizdat works, organizing mail art exhibitions, and instigating events central to the development of intellectual, artistic, and social networks within and beyond Eastern Europe.

I argue that in his work Galántai resisted the political climate under the then-existing socialism of the Eastern bloc. Instead, he pursued the very nontraditional, experimental modes politicized and banned by the state, remaining in constant dialogue with international art practices from minimal, conceptual, and body art to Fluxus and mail art, experimental art forms (particularly mail art) that fostered alternative art communities and critiqued the suffocation of personal sovereignty by totalitarian states. Indeed, for Kornelia Röder, mail art was especially "politically motivated . . . in the countries of Eastern Europe" due to "the lack of basic freedom of opinion, press, assembly and travel."[7] Drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the rhizome in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Röder also observed that mail art enabled democratization in Eastern Europe rhizomatically within the developing Global Village.[8] This notion is indebted to Marshall McLuhan's 1967 proposition that the ethics of a global society, or what he called the "new environment," is that which "compels commitment and participation," making everyone "irrecoverably involved with, and responsible for, each other."[9]

7   Kornelia Röder, *Topology and Functionality of the Mail Art Network and Its Specific Significance for Eastern Europe between 1960 and 1989*, Schriftreihe für Künstlerpublikationen vol. 5 (Cologne: Salon Verlag, 2008). Quote taken from Röder's summary of her dissertation (University of Bremen, 2006), 3, accessed January 10, 2012, http://www.museum-schwerin.de/wp-content/uploads/ 2010/10/Summary12.pdf.

8   Röder, *Topology and Functionality*, 15.

9   Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Massage* (New York: Penguin, 1967), 24.

My essay considers how mail art and samizdat publications operated as Galántai's principal modes of communication, how their social and political stakes affected his life in Hungary and beyond, and how the network he established empowered him and other artists to reach outside the confines of their restricted political and aesthetic circumstances. I also propose that mail art and samizdat publications expanded artists' communication by means of metonymy, conveying corporeal sovereignty among artists across geographical boundaries.

THE BALATONBOGLÁR CHAPEL STUDIO: A LEGACY OF RESISTANCE

The possibilities for building alternative networks and practicing experiential, experimental art after World War II were met with firm resistance in Hungary. Between 1958 and 1960, the János Kádár administration transformed socialist institutions associated with the arts, leading to "the state's monopoly in purchases of artworks, control of exhibition venues, and artists' access to studio spaces and stipends."[10] Only those artists who were members of the Association of Hungarian Artists and who graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts or the Academy of Decorative Arts had professional careers as artists.[11] After 1963, the Kádár regime began pacifying the public while attempting to make up for the brutal executions during 1956.[12]

Kádár's "goulash communism" in the 1960s was an act of guilty conscience, and no more than a handful of exhibitions attempted to put unofficial art on display at this time.[13] In December 1968, Iparterv, a "semi-official venue" at an "architectural planning office in the center of Budapest," showed a multiplicity of styles, from pop and *arte povera* to graffiti works, all of which diverged from standard official Hungarian art.[14] Such unofficial artworks were tolerated, a deliberate nod to temporary lenience aimed at mollifying dissident artists. As Forgács has argued, "[T]he means to keep the neo-avant-garde in check were more subtle and more manipulative in Hungary" than in the Soviet Union, which had

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10   Éva Forgács, "Does Democracy Grow under Pressure? Strategies of the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde throughout the Late 1960s and the 1970s," *Centropa* 8 (2008): 38.

11   Ibid.

12   Edit Sasváry, "A Moment of Experimental Democracy in the Kádár Era: György Galántai's Chapel Studio in Balatonboglár and the Social Milieu of Counter-Culture in Hungary in the 1960s and 1970s," in *Removed from the Crowd: Unexpected Encounters I*, ed. Ivana Bago, Antonia Majača, and Vesna Vuković (Zagreb: BLOK and DeLVe, 2011), 85.

13   Nikita Khrushchev coined this phrase to describe Hungarian socialism under Kádár. Also referred to as "goulash socialism."

14   Sasváry, "Moment," 85.

publicly destroyed an unofficial art show with bulldozers on September 14, 1974 (now referred to as "The Bulldozer Exhibition").[15] According to Edit Sasváry, "The control of art was informed by the political principle of balancing: make allowances here, clamp down there. How the leash relaxed or tightened always depended on the political and social constellation of the moment."[16] After a 1972 Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party meeting, the government "declar[ed] the return to hard line politics," which reinforced the divide between official and unofficial art; "vanguard art was forced out of public venues, and the term 'underground' came to be used as a synonym of the 'avant-garde,' or non-official art."[17] Exhibits like Iparterv were ridiculed and social realism remained the dominant style in Hungary, sustained by academic distrust in, disrespect for, and most of all fear of state reprisals against abstract and experimental art.

State antagonism toward experimental art turned transparent in the reception and treatment of Galántai's artworks four years after he found, renovated, and rented the abandoned church in Balatonboglár, which he began using in 1970 as an exhibition space, organizing shows for conceptual and performance artists in Hungary and Europe.[18] In his biographical sketch, Galántai described the activities at the chapel as follows:

> Altogether 35 exhibitions, concerts, poetry recitals, theatrical performances, and film showings were held in those 4 years, featuring the best of Hungary's (undesirable) avant-garde artists, and guest artists from abroad. Some highlights: 1972: the first exhibition of conceptual art in Hungary; Avant-Garde Festival (which had been banned in Budapest); István Haraszty's kinetic statues (banned in Budapest); 1972–73: performances by the banned Kassák Theater; 1973: the first exhibition of visual poetry in Hungary; etc.[19]

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15   Ibid. "The Bulldozer Exhibition" in the Soviet Union describes the events that took place on September 14, 1974, when an open-air exhibition of experimental art organized by Evgeny Rukhin and Oscar Rabin was destroyed with bulldozers and water cannons and resulted in a number of arrests. Because of international criticism of this censorship, the Soviet Union decided to put up the exhibition two weeks later for four hours, which resulted in thousands of visitors, which some refer to as "Russian (or Soviet) Woodstock."

16   Sasváry, "Moment," 85.

17   Forgács, "Does Democracy Grow?" 47.

18   Petra Stegmann, *Fluxus East: Fluxus Networks in Central Eastern Europe* (Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien GmbH, 2007), 145.

19   György Galántai and Julia Klaniczay, eds., *Lifeworks 1968–1993* (Budapest: Artpool, Enciklopédia Kiadó, 1996), 300; György Galántai, "Biography," in *György Galántai: Life Explains Art, Art Explains Life*, accessed July 12, 2011, http://www.galantai.hu/appendix/biography.html.

Exhibiting "undesirable" works of art, the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio quickly became identified as a space of confrontation in which art was a visible sign of resistance, evincing the presence of an alternative culture instantiated within state culture. Never mind if some of the artists solely explored conceptual and aesthetic questions, the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio legitimated their roles as oppositional figures in the minds of curious bystanders, certainly the authorities, and even some participants. At the conceptual core of the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio, Galántai fostered an open and collaborative environment, encouraging the participation of Hungarian and international artists and visitors alike, building networks through numerous exhibitions that would underpin Galántai's later mail art activities.

In 1973, Dóra Maurer and Gábor Tóth organized the Texts exhibition at the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio, a show that was billed as "the first international exhibition of visual experimental poetry."[20] The exhibition contained works by fifty-nine artists from numerous Eastern and Western European countries, works belonging to international conceptual art tendencies that Galántai saw at Documenta 5 in 1972, the landmark exhibition, curated by Harald Szeemann, that first brought worldwide attention to conceptual, performance, installation, and video art. Galántai wanted to advance just such experimental art at the chapel.[21] In 1973, the year the Chapel Studio was closed down, Hungarian art historian and curator László Beke also organized a proto-mail-art exhibition there called Mirror, which included postcards, collages, photographs, and conceptual artworks by artists from more than thirty countries, as well as Hungarian artists like János Tölgyesi, whose Postcard (1972) is one of the many memorable works from Mirror.[22]

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20   Júlia Klaniczay and Edit Sasvári, eds., *Törrénytelen Avantgárd. Galántai György Balatonboglári Kápolnamüterme 1970–1973/Illegal Avant-Garde: Chapel Studio of György Galántai in Balatonbóglar 1970–1973* (Budapest: Artpool-Balassi, 2003), 177.

21   Julia Klaniczay in conversation with the author in Budapest, Hungary, January 14, 2012.

22   Among the artists exhibiting in this show were Jörg Schwarzenberger (Austria), Angelo de Aquino (Brazil), Jiří H. Kocman and Petr Štembera (Czechoslovakia), David Mayor (England), Ben Vautier (France), Klaus Groh (German), Sándor Pinczehelyi (Hungary), Mieko Shiomi (Japan), Gustave Cerutti (Switzerland), and Jerzy Kiernicki (Poland). In 1970, Galántai also wanted to show a Chapel Exhibition in Budapest and collaborated with a number of artists in the process. Held in building R of the Technical University in Budapest, the R-Exhibition ended up being organized by Attila Csáji. During the preparations for this exhibition, Endre Tót shared a lot of contacts with Galántai, including the mailing address of Klaus Groh, who proved to be an important connection for Eastern European artists and for Galántai's mail art practices. Galántai in conversation with the author in Budapest, Hungary, January 12, 2012.

János Tölgyesi. *Postcard*, 1972. 14.7 × 10.4 cm. Image courtesy of the Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest. Photograph by György Galántai.

The postcard that Tölgyesi addressed to Beke instructed, "Put the postcard in front of a mirror and look out through the hole: you can get a reality-like view. If the view is not resembling enough you may cut out a larger hole equal to the 'durch-sicht'—for sure you will get a real view."[23] The postcard was situated vertically on the edge of a table with the backside facing outward, and a mirror was placed on the opposite side of the table, reflecting the postcard's image of "The Ferryman" and "Fisher," both monuments at the Balaton port. Tölgyesi also marked a hole in the postcard that would allow a viewer to look through it to see his or her own and the postcard's reflection. Beke explained,

> The mirror has a dualistic character, being dull and everyday on the one side, brilliant and incomprehensible on the other. It is coldly rational and mysterious in the same time. The single possibility to

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23   Klaniczay and Sasvári, *Törrénygtelen Avantgárd/Illegal Avant-Garde*, 168. All of the exhibition details, such as a list of artists and images of artworks and the exhibition, can be found on Artpool's website, accessed January 10, 2012, http://www.artpool.hu/boglar/1973/tukor/mirror.html.

face ourself is the mirror. The reflect[ion] is the most perfect and most transitory image. . . . The mirror is a magic object.[24]

As such, the mirror connected the physical art object (postcard)—selected, written, and sent by the artist—to the viewer, who attempted the act of viewing it from both sides at the same time in a mirror. In this key way, Tölgyesi's work of art reinforced the purpose of mail art: to unite artist, viewer, and installation in one experiential, dialogic artwork. This purpose was facilitated by the object's metonymical capacity for linkage, a function with sociopolitical ramifications that warrant more discussion here.

In formulating a political role for mail art, I follow Kristine Stiles, who in 1987 suggested how metonymy appended the conventional communicating mechanisms of metaphor in body art by directly linking viewers to performing subjects and thereby contributing to "the radical potential of body art for subject-to-subject communication."[25] In her theorization, Stiles followed Roman Jakobson.[26] While metaphor operates by "substitution," he explained, metonymy operates through "combination," namely a part for the whole by virtue of being a part of the very object, idea, word, and—I would add here—the individual to whom it refers.[27] Metonymy cannot stand on its own, being always in relation to, and part of, something else. (Stiles used the example of one's shadow as a classic metonymy; in linguistics, the example often given is the crown for the king.) In metonymy, it is not the visual or semantic similarity that constitutes linkage, but instead "their contiguity, such as syntactical or physical proximity and con-textuality."[28] What I am suggesting here is that samizdat publications and mail art, like Tölgyesi's postcard, perform both metaphorically (to re-present an artist's ideas in objective form) and metonymically (to

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24 László Beke, "Introduction—Mirror," 1973. Beke's introduction first appeared in a typewritten "catalogue" of four A4 sheets, in a Hungarian version and in an English version. His text was on page 1. A facsimile of these "catalogues," including both the Hungarian and the English versions with some illustrations and a new introduction by Beke, was published in 1992, when Artpool reorganized the show for the opening of the Artpool Art Research Center. The 1992 catalogue is not paginated, but the original English text is on page 11. The publications can be found at the Artpool Art Research Center. Also, Mirror, accessed January 12, 2012, http://www.artpool.hu/boglar/1973/ 730805e.html.

25 Kristine Stiles, "Synopsis of the Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) and Its Theoretical Significance," *The Act* 1, no. 2 (1987): 29.

26 Ibid. See also Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *The Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1956).

27 Sadeq Rahimi, "The Unconscious: Metaphor and Metonymy," *Somatosphere*, accessed January 20, 2012, http://somatosphere.net.

28 Ibid., 3.

concretize the contingency of artists' ontological, epistemological, and aesthetic visual and linguistic messages).

Jacques Lacan wrote about the role of metonymy in 1957, an argument neatly summarized by Paulina Aroch Fugellie in her description of "the slippery chain of unsatisfied desire [that] can never be fulfilled," such that "metonymy is the place of the subject's lack of being."[29] Homi Bhabha argued similarly in 1994, writing that metonymy is "a figure of contiguity that substitutes a part for a whole (an eye for an I)" and "must not be read as a form of simple substitution or equivalence."[30] While serving to bind and connect, metonymy also reinstates absence: a part of both, but never one or the other, metonymy concretizes felt absence through its own presence between two elements. In this way, Tölgyesi's mirror postcard joined artist to viewer, embodying (in the condition of its unstable reflections) a transitory, unfixed state, which could be said to have realized Lacan's point that metonymy is "a lack of being . . . where I am not, because I cannot situate myself there."[31] Considering mail art through the trope of metonymy makes it possible to grasp its sociopolitical image and bridging effect, but also how it, following Lacan's logic, made geographical distances and political challenges paradoxically more palpable in their absence. This was particularly true for Galántai, living within, and yet beyond, the context of Hungarian socialism through his mail art practice.

In this regard, it is critical to remember that mail art used the state's official postal system, the very institution that maintained the policing mechanisms of the government. While this particular network opened up possibilities for intellectual and artistic collaborations and exchanges, it also operated under the gaze and control of the authorities. As Galántai pointed out,

> Of course, nothing is truly private under dictatorship—even your soul's inner corners are under observation. Stepping out of private

29 Paulina Aroch Fugellie, "The Place of Metaphor in a Metonymic World: Of Homi Bhabha's De-realizing Politics and Other Academic Events" (paper, Encuentro II Migratory Politics conference, Amsterdam, 2007), 8.

30 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 78.

31 Lacan wrote, "This signifying game between metonymy and metaphor, up to and including the active edge that splits my desire between a refusal of the signifier and a lack of being, and links my fate to the question of my destiny, this game, in all its inexorable subtlety, is played until the match is called, there where I am not, because I cannot situate myself there." See also Lacan's "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud," in *Ecrits: A Selection*, ed. and trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 171.

circles required some caution, since bringing my concepts to the larger society proved always to be problematic. As long as I worked with some restraint, there were no great difficulties, though my mailings were under observation.[32]

On a number of occasions, mailings to and from Galántai never arrived.[33] He remembers, "The secret police were quick to note the international networking that mail art allowed, and took care to interfere particularly in Hungarian artists' contacts in the Eastern bloc."[34] While the postal system served as the primary means of transporting and extending artists' concepts and actions, its surreptitious network frequently intercepted artists' postings, interrupting their metonymic circulation. When mail art was delivered, its obscure visual and textual references helped artists to evade censorship. Perhaps like a rhizome, but more like an artistic rock thrown through the postal window of a nation's boundaries, mail art laid bare cultural separation by breaking through metaphorical and actual political barriers. As one mail art manifesto urged, "Mail art is not objects going through the mail, but artists establishing direct *contact* with other artists, sharing ideas and experiences, all over the world."[35]

Just such aims inspired László Beke's *Tug of War Action* (1972) and *Shaking Hands* (1972) at the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio, both aimed at creating international artistic dialogue. In these events Hungarian and Czechoslovakian artists first engaged in a "tug of war" followed by "shaking hands," actions that were photographed. Beke remembers,

> I somehow happened to come across an English language periodical with a special issue on Czechoslovakia. It featured a fascinating photo of the unified troops, which had just marched into Czechoslovakia, lining up to play a game called "tug-of-war," immediately before or

32 Excerpt from a longer interview with György Galántai in December 1991, originally published in *The New Hungarian Quarterly* no. 125 (Spring 1992): 96–100. Republished and edited in Hans-Peter Feldmann, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Beatrice von Bismarck, Diethelm Stoller, and Ulf Wuggening, eds., *Interarchive. Archivarische Praktiken und Handlungsräume im zeitgenössischen Kunstfeld/Archival Practices and Sites in the Contemporary Art Field* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2002), 393–95.

33 Galántai in conversation with the author in Budapest, Hungary, January 12, 2012.

34 Galántai, *Resistance as "Behavior-Art": The Dissident Hungarian Avant-Garde* (manuscript, 1999), 2, Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest, Hungary.

35 John Held Jr., "New York Correspondance School Exhibition," in *At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet*, ed. Annmarie Chandler and Norie Neumark (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 101, emphasis added.
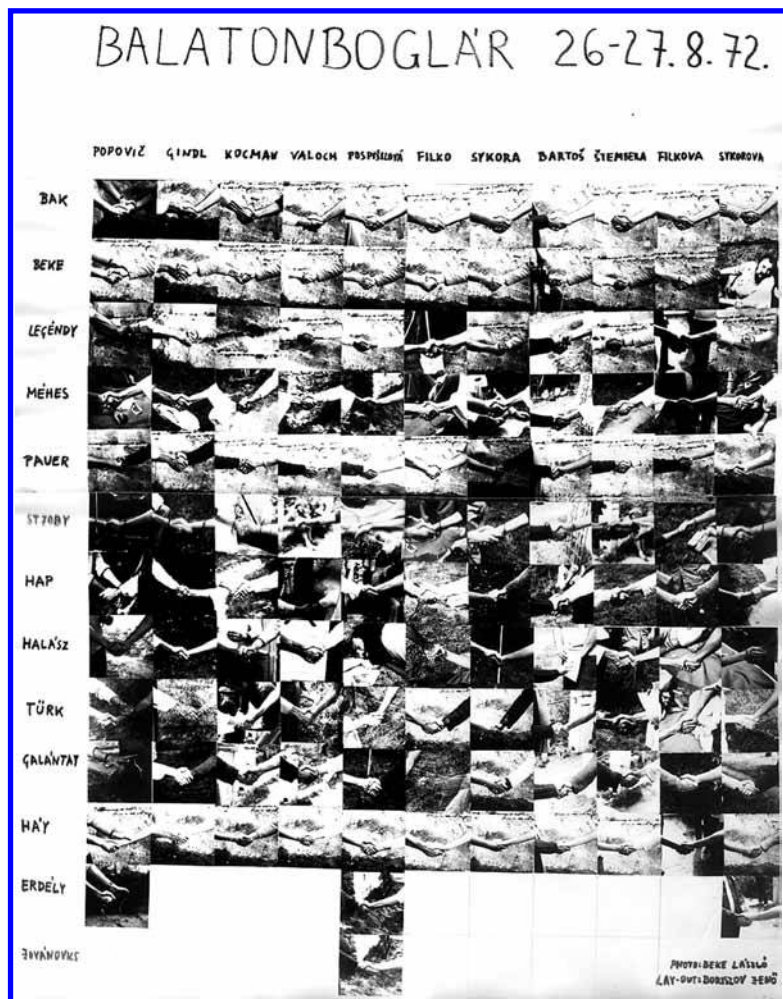
László Beke. *Shaking Hands*, 1972. Action board, photo reproduction of the original tableau, approx. 31 × 40 cm. Image courtesy of the Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest. Photograph by László Beke.

after occupying a village. Thus, I organized a tableau vivant to this effect in Balatonboglár.[36]

Beke then assembled the close-up photographs of each handshake in a pattern of squares. Gyula Pauer recalls that the series of photographs signified

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36   "An Interview with László Beke, 1998," in Klaniczay and Sasvári, *Törrénygtelen Avantgárd/ Illegal Avant-Garde*, 141, translation taken from *Parallel Chronologies: "Other" Revolutionary Traditions: How Art Becomes Public. An Exhibition in Newspaper Format* (Budapest: Tranzit Hungary, 2011), 33.

how the two countries had "symbolically made peace with each other, at a time when our political system was still in conflict with Czechoslovakia. We made peace, and that was important."[37] In addition to this metaphoric meaning, the photographs played a metonymic role: even if the action was brief and the artists dispersed after their temporary union, the photograph served then, as it does today, as an extension of their meeting, marking a moment of physical contact and creative immediacy that their respective countries of origin made difficult.

The international exhibitions at Balatonboglár Chapel Studio provided early opportunities for contact between artists within Eastern Europe and abroad and, in so doing, helped them to withstand their political isolation. In 1985, however, Beke warned that "[t]otal freedom [is] perhaps the most monumental slogan that the avant-garde could conjure up . . . but . . . it was unable to materialize [that freedom] in socially feasible terms."[38] Yet, what made the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio a radical experiment was how it opened opportunities for alternative thinking and, in so doing, resisted the putative lack of their "social feasibility" in that repressive climate.

Galántai paid the price for defying prescribed artistic norms and for appearing to mock state dictates, as the Chapel Studio in Balatonboglár was closed, in part through the policies and practices of György Aczél. Serving as the "chief Communist Party ideologue" during the 1970s and much of the 1980s, Aczél implemented "guidelines" for the party, sustained "the centrally organized state institutions for the teaching, funding and exhibiting of the fine arts," and asserted the sovereignty of the state over that of the people, and certainly over what were perceived to be the excesses of artists.[39] The police carried out these policies through intimidation, repeated checkups, and arrests at the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio, which began as early as June 1973.[40] Such police activities continued along

37   "An Interview with Gyula Pauer, 1998," in Klaniczay and Sasvári, *Törrénygtelen Avantgárd/ Illegal Avant-Garde,* 142, translation taken from *Parallel Chronologies,* 33.

38   László Beke, *Hajas Tibor: 1946–1980* (Paris: Magyar Mühely-d'Atelier, 1985), 4.

39   Forgács, "Does Democracy Grow?" 43. See also Tom Mulligan, "Hungarian Underground Art: 1970–1990," *Art Monthly* (June 1990): 12–13.

40   Artpool, "Chapel Exhibitions at Balatonboglár—1973," accessed August 10, 2011, http://www.artpool.hu/boglar/1973/chron073.html. Around the same time, the infamous writer and political dissident Miklós Haraszti was also arrested for his samizdat publication *A Worker in a Worker's State.* Haraszti had frequently visited the events at the Chapel Studio. By 1974, a number of artists associated with the Chapel Studio had been arrested by the police, including Tamás Szentjóby, who left Hungary for Switzerland by the end of 1974. See Amy Brouillette, "Remapping Samizdat: Underground Publishing and the Hungarian Avant-Garde, 1966 to 1975" (MA thesis, Central European University, Budapest, 2009), 70–74.

with a bureaucratic conflict (between Galántai and the authorities) resulting in the false accusation that the chapel was closed for "reasons of health," among others.[41] Although Galántai and other artists and intellectuals disputed the closing, as well as the accusations against Galántai, they did not prevail.[42]

Only four months after the chapel was shut down, an incriminating column written by László Szabó, editor in chief of the crimes column for *Népszabadság*, guaranteed Galántai's professional alienation and ruin.[43] The "party daily" *Népszabadság*, with its role in serving the Politburo and dominant party politics, was the perfect vehicle for attacking the artist.[44] But as Julia Klaniczay has noted, while it was "absurd" to find an artist discussed in the crimes column of the official party newspaper, it proved that artistic experimentation, which challenged the state's political vision, had serious consequences.[45] Some wrote to *Népszabadság* in support of Galántai and asked the magazine editors to rehabilitate his public image, but to no avail.[46] Szabó's article marked the beginning of Galántai's isolation, since friends and artists with whom he had worked distanced themselves for fear of reprisals and of being blacklisted.[47]

What Galántai did not have to face was a prison sentence. But the closing of the Chapel Studio had an enormous impact on his professional and private life: he became a "persona non grata,"[48] repeatedly scolded and censored by the state in a cultural climate described in 1986 by Konrád this way:

> Solidarity came, and then Solidarity went; then it was Brezhnev, now it's already Gorbachev. Movement, crisis, reforms, crackdowns, liberalizations—but the dominant role of the party remains the sacrosanct *sine qua non*. . . . In state socialism this is the basic of basics. He who agrees to being controlled exists.[49]

41   Artpool, "Chapel Exhibitions."

42   Ibid.

43   Ibid.

44   Rudolf L. Tökés, *Hungary's Negotiated Revolution: Economic Reform, Social Change, and Political Succession, 1957–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 271–72.

45   Klaniczay in conversation with the author in Budapest, Hungary, January 14, 2012.

46   Artpool, "Chapel Exhibitions."

47   Klaniczay in conversation with the author, January 14, 2012.

48   Hegyi, "Hungarian Art," 270.

49   György Konrád, "Foreword," in Miklós Haraszti, *The Velvet Prison: Artists under State Socialism* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), xiii.

Konrád points to the contradictory condition of being exiled within one's own country, arriving at a sense of personal "nonexistence," denied opportunities to work as an artist, and deprived of the support of colleagues and friends. Yet, despite all the censorship, arrests, and harassment, political scientist Rudolf L. Tökés has argued that Kádár's measures against dissidents were not drastic. "Whereas Stalin shot or imprisoned his troublesome intellectuals," Tökés wrote, "Kádár only distrusted and, by all accounts, despised them."[50] Instead of executing the insubordinate intellectuals, Kádár pressured these putative enemies of the state into nonexistence by delegitimizing their status in society and denying them all legal means of expression and self-determination. This explains why, as Galántai has written of himself in the third person, "For years, he would get no work, his acquaintances would be afraid to be seen with him on the street, he was penniless, and his teeth fell out from malnutrition."[51] Pushed to the margins of culture, increasingly invisible, and harassed by bureaucratic demands, the artist merely survived. "What saved him from starvation," Galántai continued, "was an order from a tradesman for some gaudy souvenir tablecloths."[52]

ARTPOOL IN FLUX

After the six-year hiatus following the closing of the Chapel Studio, Galántai entered the international mail art network in 1979. That network of artists around the world offered interpersonal contact, support, and recognition, as well as an open flow of inspirational works. The result of his involvement in mail art was that Galántai earned respect both within and beyond Hungary. "For me, it was the connection that was important,"[53] Galántai stated in 2007: "I saw the magical qualities of stamps: a lot of information in a small space. (Don't forget we were in an environment that was starved of information!)"[54] The opportunity to "exist" and travel "in a small space" (as small as a stamp), all under the gaze of the government, was miraculous indeed. Mail art permitted him to become connected virtually with others around the globe while knowing very well that he was actually "starved" of such a reality. In a 1979 diary entry, Galántai asked,

50   Tökés, *Hungary's Negotiated Revolution*, 156.
51   Galántai, "Biography."
52   Ibid.
53   Kata Bodor, "Interview with György Galántai, the Curator of the *Parastamp* Exhibition," in *Parastamp: Four Decades of Artistamps, from Fluxus to the Internet* (Budapest: Szepmuveszeti Museum, 2007), 89.
54   Ibid., 85.

"What is Mail Art/Network? Sect, sickness, [safety] valve, exchange of information, satisfaction of secret desires, constant presence, expanded space, readiness, discipline, devotion, daily exhibition, maximal inspiration, voluntary hard labor, feedback, etc."[55] This time, 1978–79, also marks the moment when, answering his own existential questions, he renewed his art practice by collaborating with Klaniczay in the creation of Artpool, the framework that enabled Galántai to work as a conceptual, performance, video, installation, and mail art artist, as well as to curate and publish.

The process of finding "maximal inspiration" and establishing creative networks was an element of Fluxus that appealed to Galántai, who first encountered Fluxus in the early and mid-1970s, especially through the work of the French economist, poet, and artist Robert Filliou.[56] Together with George Brecht in the south of France in the summer of 1965, Filliou had conceived of "The Eternal Network," a concept requiring artists to accept the idea that art making is a shared process, a "Fête Permanente going around [one] all the time in all parts of the world."[57] This idea inspired Galántai's own concept of art, and his emphasis on the medium of mail art, as initiating an ethical bond with a recipient. Owen Smith has observed that Fluxus is "a network of ideas around which a varied group of artists have collaborated."[58] Similarly, Galántai conceived of the Artpool archive as "a living institution that can be interpreted as an organic and open artwork or an activist kind of art practice. Its field of operation is the whole world; it works with an exact aim and direction, sensitively detecting changes and adjusting accordingly."[59] Galántai positioned Artpool squarely in the international community with an ethical foundation dedicated to global, democratic artistic practice, respectful of the individual, and ever changing. In 2007 on the occasion of the Fluxus East exhibition, Galántai described the essence of Fluxus as "undefinedness" for how it makes "art impersonal."[60] At the same time, he viewed his early Balatonboglár Chapel Studio activities and his subsequent work

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55 Galántai, "Diary," in *Lifeworks 1968–1993*, 243. Also Galántai, "Biography."

56 Stegmann, *Fluxus East*, 143.

57 John Held Jr., "The Mail Art Exhibition: Personal Worlds to Cultural Strategies," in Chandler and Neumark, *At a Distance*, 102.

58 Owen F. Smith, "Fluxus Praxis: An Exploration of Connections, Creativity, and Community," in Chandler and Neumark, *At a Distance*, 118–19.

59 Stegmann, *Fluxus East*, 145.

60 Ibid., 142.

with Artpool as "a unique Fluxus Product," namely the recognition of art as "an institution-work."[61]

Galántai also identified with "Fluxus . . . as a publishing venture [with] publishing . . . at its very heart."[62] The innovation of Fluxus publications was, as Simon Anderson has written, in its "attempts to subvert form in order to reflect content, [and in] the very method of their production and distribution."[63] Fluxus publications produced in the United States by Lithuanian émigré George Maciunas ranged "from pamphlets and flyers to tablecloths and films; from luxurious, handcrafted furniture to deliberately flimsy throwaways; from vainly ambitious commercial projects to those that held darkly obscured innuendos."[64] Galántai used the unconventional publications of the international Fluxus community as a model for Artpool, but his context was profoundly different. Maciunas flirted with a Marxist critique of capitalist modes of art production (especially under Henry Flynt's more radical political influence) all the while churning out Fluxus boxes, Fluxus films, Fluxus publications and ephemera, and Fluxus exhibitions.[65] Moreover, in typical absurdist Fluxus fashion, Maciunas wrote Fluxus letters to Nikita Khrushchev, then the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, urging him to adapt Fluxus as an official cultural policy of the Soviet Union.[66] Such playful aesthetics were unthinkable for Galántai, who lived under the political specter of the Soviet Union and under constant surveillance until 1988 in Hungary. Nothing even remotely similar to the mischief of Maciunas's actions was possible for Fluxus-associated artists in the East. Few examples make this point more poignantly than that of Milan Knížák, who was arrested and imprisoned in the former Czechoslovakia over 300 times between 1959 and 1989 for his Fluxus-associated identity and work.

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61 Ibid., 145.

62 Simon Anderson, "Fluxus Publicus," in *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, ed. Elizabeth Armstrong and Joan Rothfuss (Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 1993), 40.

63 Ibid., 40.

64 Ibid., 40.

65 Kristine Stiles discusses Henry Flynt's influence on Maciunas and the conflicts it caused with George Brecht and other Fluxus artists in "Between Water and Stone: Fluxus Performance, a Metaphysics of Acts," in Armstrong and Rothfuss, *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, 62–99. On the subject of Flynt's influence and politics, see also Stiles's essay "David Tudor—Alive, Free, and without Need of Culture," in the special issue "Composers inside Electronics: Music after David Tudor," *Leonardo Music Journal* 14 (2004): 62–63.

66 Astrit Schmidt-Burkhardt, "Maciunas' 'Atlas of Russian History,'" in *Exhibitions—"Fluxus Happening": "Mapping Maciunas" and "Exercise,"* George Maciunas Foundation, accessed February 2, 2012, http://georgemaciunas.com/?page_id=1880.

György Galántai and Julia Klaniczay, eds. *The Artpool (Pool Window no. 1)*, 1979. 16 pages, offset, 11.4 × 16 cm. Image courtesy of the Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest.

One of the challenges in Hungary was a lack of information about national and international art events. For this reason, from December 1979 to 1982, Galántai and Klaniczay began to distribute their first samizdat newsletter *Pool Window*. It was initially directed at Hungarian artists and called for participation in international mail art exhibitions. They also listed addresses and names of mail artists from all over the world and reported on Artpool's activities. In the spirit of internationalism, the thirty-one issues of *Pool Window* were primarily published in English and aimed at involving—and thus representing—Hungarian artists in the international art scene. Nevertheless, published material about existing experimental art events and happenings in Hungary remained almost nonexistent, leading Galántai and Klaniczay to publish from 1983 to 1985 the more elaborate *Aktualis Level* or *Artpool Letter* (*AL*), "a Xeroxed samizdat art journal, each copy certified as art, numbered and signed," which they distributed to the Hungarian art community.[67] *AL* contained updates on

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67   Klaniczay in conversation with the author in Budapest, Hungary, January 14, 2012, and Galántai, "Biography."

Ben Vautier. "Everything Must Be Said," 1983. Cover of *AL1*, first issue of *Aktualis Level/Artpool Letter*, edited and published by György Galántai and Julia Klaniczay, photocopy, rubber stamp, 15 x 21 cm. Image courtesy of the Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest.

the underground activities of artists, unofficial exhibitions, critical essays by oppositional writers, and Hungarian translations of articles about new and alternative international art tendencies and was the only current publication in Hungary that reviewed, announced, and documented the "unofficial" Hungarian art scene.[68]

In the first issue of *AL*, Galántai and Klaniczay published a talk given in December 1982 by the artist Ákos Birkás in which he "analyzed the causes that formed the international and Hungarian avant-garde and the ones that hindered its further development and finally led to its fall." Birkás surmised that the "Hungarian avant-garde today finds itself in a moral crisis which entails the corruption of the moral norms of the avant-

68   For example, in the *AL* summer issue of 1983, dedicated to celebrating the tenth anniversary of the last year of the Balatonboglár chapel in 1973, *AL* printed Miklós Haraszti's written entry in the Chapel guestbook, in which he commented on Tibor Hajas's happening of the same year. Artpool, *Artpool Letter* no. 5 (1983): 55, accessed November 26, 2011, available from http://www.artpool.hu/Al/al.html. All copies of *AL* are also available for research at the Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest, Hungary.

garde."[69] Similar questions occupied Galántai and Klaniczay and motivated them to publish a samizdat art journal that encouraged discussion about experimental art that was otherwise missing, and keep its readership current with changing artistic events.[70] Artpool also reached out to foreign artists and included an English summary of the contents of each *AL* for non-Hungarian readers.[71] The cover of the first issue bore the work of the French artist Ben Vautier, who ironically proclaimed in Hungarian, "Everything must be said." In a country where what was published or spoken often resulted in a confrontation with the authorities, Artpool's publications posed additional challenges to the Hungarian government.[72] While some have pointed to differences between political and artistic samizdat, arguing that artistic samizdat was concerned not with politics but with aesthetics, it is impossible to make that distinction in socialist regimes, where artists' samizdat publications throughout the Soviet Union and its bloc were also confiscated regularly as damaging to the nation. The point is that when life is viewed primarily in political terms, the decision to produce samizdat is itself an act of noncompliance.

In creating and distributing their samizdat publications, Galántai and Klaniczay considerably expanded the possibilities for collaboration, at the risk of attracting further government harassment. Referring to that period of the production of samizdat publications in Eastern Europe, the contemporary Zagreb-based curator's collective What, How and for Whom has argued, "The political practice of art was realized as a fight for the complete self-realization of individuals and culture, against real bureaucratic limitations, taking socialist ideology more seriously than the cynical political élite in power did."[73] Indeed, like so many artists in the Eastern

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69   Klaniczay in conversation with the author, January 14, 2012. The English summary of Ákos Birkás's lecture on the death of the avant-garde, "Who's the Victim? Who Did It? What Should Be Done?" *AL* 1 (1983). Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest, Hungary, original translation amended by the author.

70   Klaniczay in conversation with the author, January 14, 2012.

71   Klaniczay in conversation with the author in Budapest, Hungary, May 27, 2008.

72   For a discussion of police surveillance, intimidation, interference, and arrests of artists and writers in Hungary, see Brouillette's "Remapping Samizdat."

73   What, How and for Whom, "Artist's Books in (What Was Formerly Known as) Eastern Europe," *Printed Matter*, accessed January 10, 2012, http://www.printedmatter.org/researchroom/essays/whw.cfm. Slavoj Žižek has argued that "overidentification" with any regime's political ideology poses the greatest threat to the government itself. See his essay "Why Are Laibach and NSK Not Fascists?" in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s*, ed. Laura Hoptman and Tomás Pospiszyl (New York: MOMA, 2002), 285–88.

bloc, Galántai intensively studied Marxist aesthetics and identified with communist theories, frequently challenging the authorities when they labeled his work as anticommunist.[74] In fact, artists experienced this conundrum throughout many socialist countries, namely of being perceived by the regime to have made art contrary to the state but seeing themselves as believing in socialist and/or communist values.

Karl Marx had posited in his early writings that communism could enable the "positive supersession" of the state, eradicating the need for an intermediary (religion, for example) between the individual and his or her sovereignty.[75] Marx urged "the complete restoration of man to himself as *social*, i.e. human, being."[76] By this account, communism aimed to collapse the gap between the public and civil self, between the ideal citizen and the actual living person. Despite the stated aim of socialist governments, Hungarians like Galántai and artists who had a different vision of Marxism experienced this purpose as a nightmare. "When democratic sovereignty *confronts* the people with all the violence that it monopolizes as the legitimate embodiment *of* the people," cultural theorist Susan Buck-Morss has written, "it is in fact attesting to its *non*identity within the people."[77] Such a circumstance was especially evident in Hungary in the aftermath of the revolution of 1956, as Katona has suggested, where the wish to forget or move past the experience of those events, especially within families, led to the subsequent susceptibility of future generations to becoming vulnerable to the misleading narratives advocated by the socialist government.[78] In a related comment, Miklós Haraszti, the writer and political dissident, explained in 1986,

The advent of state socialism heralded a rise in social mobility. . . . Many artists of the first generation had genuine proletarian origins. They were members of a class to whom education had been denied. Their emancipation seemed synonymous with the liberation offered by socialism. Even now. . . . They see their own rise as a consequence of the rule of the people, and they have had to continue to insist on this illusion even after the self-critical discovery of "mistakes" and

74 Galántai in conversation with the author in Budapest, Hungary, January 5, 2012.
75 Karl Marx, *Early Writings* (New York: Penguin, 1992), 348.
76 Ibid.
77 Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 7, emphasis original.
78 Csiszer and Katona, "Hungary," 40.

Everybody with Anybody, 1982. Rubber stamping event at the Young Artists' Club, Budapest.
Image courtesy of the Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest. Photograph by György Galántai.

"crimes." The revolution is like family: no matter how terrible your
parents, without them you certainly would never have been born.[79]

I have argued that Galántai and Klaniczay resisted this compliant attitude
and that Artpool's mail art and samizdat publications represented politi-
cal acts, as if following Walter Benjamin's decree: "We must wake up from
the world of our parents."[80] Perhaps the most audacious political deci-
sion they made was to stipulate that those who bought a copy of one of
their publications were required to leave their signatures with Artpool.
As Klaniczay put it, such participants in their work had to be held account-
able; "they had to gain responsibility."[81] For the act of signing reaffirmed
one's autonomy and sovereignty, or it exposed the duplicitous. In this way,
Galántai and Klaniczay educated themselves about the legal ambiguities
that would permit them to produce and distribute samizdat artworks in
and beyond Hungary.

Galántai and Klaniczay operated Artpool from their apartment, and
as exhibition spaces for Artpool were few and far between and constantly

79 Haraszti, *Velvet Prison*, 51–52.
80 Walter Benjamin, "Das Passagen-Werk," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, ed. Rolf Tiedermann
   (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1982), 1048. This quote was brought to my attention by Susan
   Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, 209.
81 Klaniczay in conversation with the author in Budapest, Hungary, May 27, 2008.

in flux, they referred to their situation and presentations as Artpool Periodical Spaces. For example, in the Artpool event Everybody with Anybody, which took place on February 26, 1982, at the Young Artists' Club in Budapest, artists and viewers were invited to create improvised artworks with rubber stamps, which were hard to come by in Hungary at that time. In a telephone interview with Galántai, Miklós Erdély made a critical distinction between stamps used by the state and stamps used by artists.[82] When employed by the state, Erdély insisted, stamping represented "something extremely simple to solve extremely difficult problems, such as taking somebody's life. Pulling the trigger and that's all there is to it. That is bureaucracy."[83] In view of the power of such seemingly insignificant, everyday objects, Erdély's description of the state as a body holding a loaded weapon underscores the severity of the pedantic bureaucratic aggravation endured by the public for decades.

Because the government did not permit rubber stamps for private individuals, fearing that they would be confused with official stamps (which in mail art, of course, they were, and were intended to be), Galántai asked a number of artists to design stamps and hired one engraver to produce the stamps illegally.[84] Galántai hung the artist's rubber stamps from the ceiling, and when the action began, people stamped sheets of paper and each other's faces and bodies. Klaniczay remembers that Everybody with Anybody offered an extraordinary moment of release from censorship, as this spontaneous art making and simultaneous exhibition could not be juried, thus creating an atmosphere of play and connectedness rare at that time in Hungary.[85] Such an exhibition/happening demonstrated how mail art bridged the absence of those unable to be physically present. For whenever a sheet of stamps was "finished," Galántai ritually stamped it with Dutch mail artist Ko de Jonge's *Open Here*, marking its completion with the sign of the absent, yet present, Dutch artist.

Galántai organized a number of other important projects that broadened the possibilities for contact between Hungarian artists and art con-

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82   Miklós Erdély was instrumental for the whole generation of artists in the 1960s and 1970s in Hungary, and especially for Galántai's development of experimental techniques in art. György Galántai in conversation with the author in Budapest, Hungary, October 26, 2011.

83   Miklós Erdély in telephone interview with Galántai, translated by György Somogyi and published in *Mindenki Mindenkivel/Everybody with Anybody* (samizdat exhibition catalogue, Artpool's Periodical Space No. 11, exhibition at the Young Artist's Club Budapest, February 26, 1982). The catalogue was accessed at the Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest.

84   Géza Perneczky, *The Magazine Network: The Trends of Alternative Art in the Light of Their Periodicals 1968–1988* (Cologne: Soft Geometry, 1993), 82–83.

85   Klaniczay in conversation with the author in Budapest, Hungary, January 10, 2012.
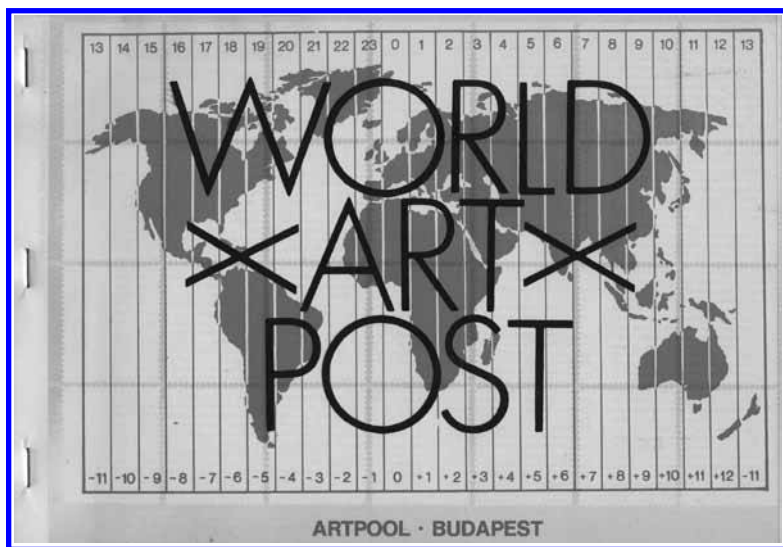
György Galántai, *World Art Post*, 1982. Catalog cover, offset, serigraphy on plastic foil, 29.6 × 20.7 cm. Image courtesy of the Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest.

texts throughout the world. With his World Art Post exhibition, held at the Fészek Klub in Budapest in 1982, he brought artworks from more than thirty countries to Hungary.[86] "We wanted the whole world to appear in one definite place at one definite time," Galántai and Klaniczay remembered.[87] Fittingly, the samizdat catalogue cover featured the world with only time zones—not borders—marked in order to symbolize the possibilities of establishing networks beyond social, geographical, and political barriers. Galántai showed every single work of the 550 artists in the catalogue, which he produced with the help of two professional factory printers whom he convinced to print the catalogue illegally with his help on the weekend, when the factory was officially closed. "The result" of World Art Post was to facilitate "a communication network with special emphasis on its spatial existence," art historian and sociologist Anna Wessely wrote in the catalogue, concluding that the exhibition and samizdat catalogue itself had become "a conceptual sculpture." Wessely added, "The action

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86   Artists from the following countries participated in World Art Post: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, France, (East) Germany, (West) Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Caledonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Saudi Arabia, the Soviet Union, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United States, Venezuela, and Yugoslavia.

87   Galántai and Klaniczay, "World Art Post," in *World Art Post* (Budapest: Artpool, 1982), n.p. Catalogue accessed at the Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest.

had a time dimension as well. The temporal sequence of artists' stamps as delivered by the postman, realizes a random montage of pictorial forms which, as a whole, becomes significant on a new level as one single statement speaking many languages simultaneously."[88]

One could also posit that the World Art Post project presented possibilities for "speaking many languages simultaneously," thereby undermining the "monolithic voice" of the government with the heteroglossia of artists communicating with one another in multiple verbal and visual languages but in one voice of many dialects.[89] What's more, the catalogue emphasized this connection, as Galántai and Klaniczay sent it to all the participants, creating a permanent exhibition, open to anyone who owned or had access to a copy of the catalogue or, today, the Internet, where the exhibition and its catalogue are posted on Artpool's website.[90]

As might be expected, before long the authorities began to interfere again more actively in Galántai's mail art activities. In January 1984, the police immediately closed his mail art exhibition Hungary Can Be Yours! International Hungary at the Young Artists' Club in Budapest.[91] The Ministry of Interior Report on the banned exhibition, written by one "Zoltán Pécsi," stated, "For Galántai's competition several 'works of art' (in reality plain botch-works) had been provided that are politically problematic, [as they] destructively criticize and, moreover—primarily some of those made by Hungarian 'artists'—mock and attack our state and social order as well as the state security organs."[92] Secret agent Pécsi also noted that "enemy ideas were on show" and that "enemy persons belonging to the opposition" were present at the exhibition.[93] Political dissidents

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88 Anna Wessely, "Untitled Statement," in *World Art Post*, n.p.

89 Kristine Stiles has noted, "The struggle between the multiplicity of internal voices and the monolithic voice of external authority breeds trauma." In "Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies: Representations from Cultures of Trauma," originally published in *Stratégie II: Peuples méditerranéens* [Paris] 64–65 (July–December 1993): 95–117, reprinted with a new forward in *Talking Gender: Public Images, Personal Journeys, and Political Critiques*, ed. Nancy A. Hewitt, Jean F. O'Barr, and Nancy Rosebaugh (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 52.

90 The exhibition and its catalogue can be found on Artpool's website, accessed January 12, 2012, http://www.artpool.hu/Artistamp/WAP/default.html.

91 László F. Földényi, "Der Weg der ungarischen Kunst," in *Kunst der Neunziger Jahre in Ungarn* (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1999), 12.

92 This official Ministry of Interior document discussing and evaluating the Hungary Is Yours exhibit is dated 1984 and titled "MINISTRY OF INTERIOR, III/III-4-b-Sub-department," available at the Artpool Art Research Center, accessed November 22, 2010, http://www.artpool.hu/Commonpress51/report.html. "Zoltán Pécsi" was the secret agent name of Gustav M. Habermann. He was a trusted member in art circles and known as László Algol.

93 Ibid.
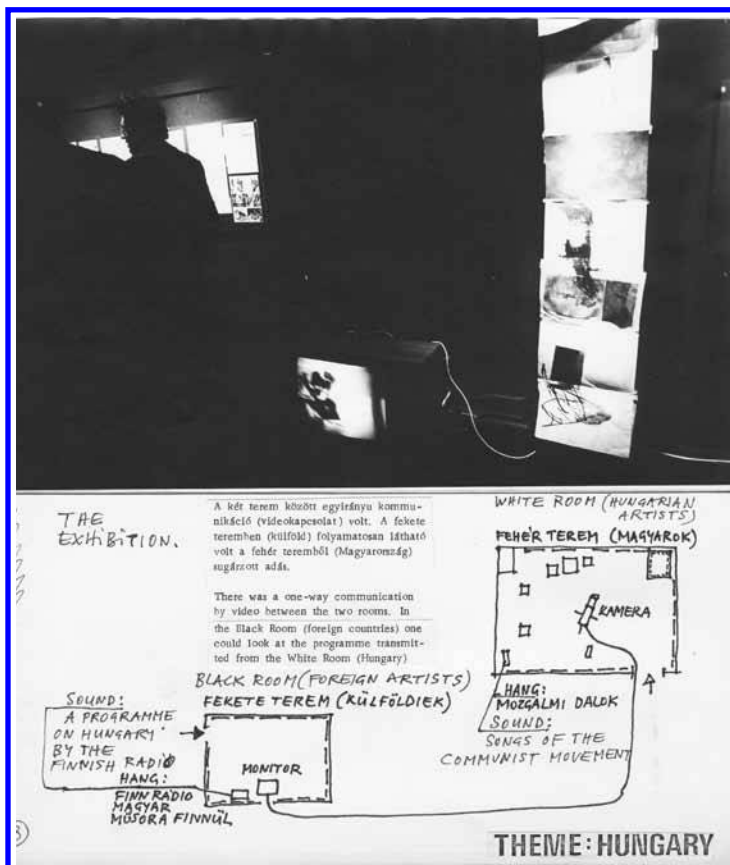
György Galántai, *Photograph and Diagram of the Exhibition Space of "Hungary Can Be Yours!,"* 1984. Photo, drawing, collage, 21 × 24.2 cm. Image courtesy of Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest. Image from Galántai's samizdat publication *Commonpress 51*, 1984.

Miklós Haraszti and Gábor Demszky were among those identified as subversives present at the exhibition.

The works of some fifty "enemy persons" were sent from eighteen foreign countries to Budapest to be part of Hungary Can Be Yours! International Hungary.[94] Galántai's curatorial decisions for the display of these artist's works in the exhibition stand out. A TV installation that connected the two exhibition rooms served as a one-way communication by video between foreign artists and Hungarian artists. Works by foreigners were displayed inside the Black Room with the TV set, which screened

94   Földényi, "Der Weg der ungarischen Kunst," 11.
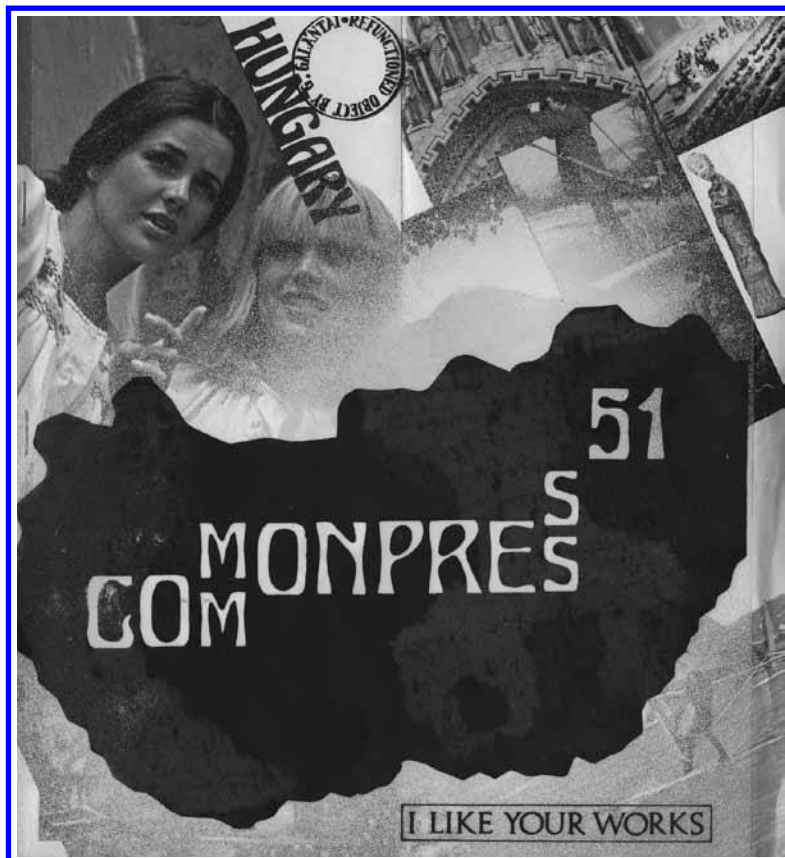
György Galántai. *Commonpress 51*, 1984. Catalogue cover, serigraphy, and spray-on plastic foil, "offi-
cial" color offset prospectus, 21 × 24.2 cm. Image courtesy of Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest.

the Hungarian artworks exhibited inside the White Room, where the cam-
era was placed along with audio tracks of "songs of the communist move-
ment."[95] In this interactive video and sound installation, Westerners were
literally placed in the dark about the nature and history of Hungarian art,
and could encounter Hungarian culture only in a mediated and artificial
way.[96] The frequent delay of information traveling from the camera to the
video screen emphasized the problems of communication between the
East and West. Galántai's own artistic contribution to this mail art exhi-

95   To see documentation of this event, see "Hungary Can Be Yours! International Hungary,"
      accessed October 18, 2010, http://www.artpool.hu/Commonpress51/defaulte.html.
96   Video installations were uncommon and difficult to execute at the time, Klaniczay remem-
      bers, as video was a difficult medium to acquire and use for filmmakers and artists.
      Klaniczay in conversation with the author in Budapest, Hungary, January 10, 2012.

bition was as a curator designing the installation as a metaphor for disjointed cultural relations and as a metonymy for uniting Hungarian and international art.

That same year, Artpool edited and published *Commonpress 51*.[97] In a humorous, satirical social critique of the banning of the exhibition Hungary Can Be Yours! International Hungary, this samizdat book documented the works of the 110 artists involved in the show.[98] In preparing the issue, Galántai and Klaniczay sent invitations to the participants promising, "Any media, any size. Every material related to Hungary will be reproduced." While they had planned to collaborate on the cover by featuring Hungarian tourist propaganda, the individual who had promised to provide Artpool with that material pulled out of the project fearing further reprisals from the government. Undaunted, Galántai and Klaniczay assembled twenty-five photocopy editions of *Commonpress 51* and distributed and mailed them out to individuals in Hungary and around the world. Galántai summarized the effect of this mail art exhibition and subsequent samizdat publication when he commented, "We can take it as symbolic that the last exhibition banned by the regime was a mail art exhibit in 1984, entitled: 'Hungary Can Be Yours/International Hungary.'"[99]

CONCLUSION

Although banned repeatedly, blacklisted, and living a socially and professionally isolated life in Hungary, Galántai, with the partnership of Klaniczay, persisted. Perhaps the best synopsis of his efforts was the establishment of Buda Ray University, a project that kept the artist mentally and emotionally productive in the 1980s, and enabled him to make contact with the American artist Ray Johnson. In 1982, after Johnson sent him a work with the instruction "add to and send it back," Galántai extended to other artists the opportunity to collaborate with Johnson. Then, in the spirit of both Johnson's New York Correspondence School and his Buddha University, Galántai founded Buda Ray University, an "institution of

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97 After the political turn in 1989, the pair organized the exhibition Reconstruction of a Banned Exhibition in the Young Artists' Club, which was an exact replica of the 1984 banned exhibition Hungary Can Be Yours! For this occasion, they printed three hundred copies of *Commonpress 51* in color.

98 This was a separate issue of the international mail art magazine *Commonpress* launched in 1977 by Polish artist Pavel Petasz, who invited artists from around the world to edit issues of the journal, including Ko De Jonge from the Netherlands (1978), Klaus Groh from Germany (1979), Russell Butler (1980), and John Held Jr. (1984), both from the United States.

99 Galántai, *Resistance as "Behavior-Art,"* 2.

continuity, as a model of a world where everything is in continuous change, where everything is transformed into various media and even goes back to the starting point." Galántai explained, "Anything is possible in the *Buda Ray University*," understanding his mail art institution "as a medium of collective communication just like a radio."[100] In a diary entry of 1982, he added,

> Here, as in real life, one keeps switching roles. For there are two people in all of us: the teacher and the student; thus, there is no difference between teacher and student. Every member of the university asks and answers questions. The questions and answers are visual.[101]

Some 300 artists from over thirty countries sent artworks to Galántai for the Buda Ray University.[102] Galántai eventually initiated Artpool's Ray Johnson Space in order to display the correspondences of Buda Ray University and to curate mail art exhibitions.[103] Thinking about the relationship between Johnson and Galántai, the writer William S. Wilson commented in a letter to Artpool,

> Buda and Pest are both two and one. . . . [M]ention of Budapest is mention of bridges. "Bridge" is an image governing many of Ray's images, as he bridges gaps and opposites like opposite banks of a river. Heidegger on the Danube hovers in the background, because his meditation on bridges illuminates Ray's art, as his methods of visual and verbal thinking, and his life, as it ended in a leap throwing himself from a bridge. I have just bridged Ray and Budapest.[104]

100 Quoted in Kornelia Röder's presentation "Relations between Ray Johnson and Eastern Europe" for the "How to Draw a Bunny: Reconsidering Mail Art" panel (College Art Association Annual Conference, Chicago, 2010). The quote is from György Galantai, *Buda Ray University Leaflet* (Budapest: Artpool Art Research Center, 1989).

101 Galántai, "Diary," in *Lifeworks 1968–1993*, 252. See also György Galántai, "Diary," in *György Galántai: Life Explains Art, Art Explains Life*, accessed January 12, 2012, http://www.galantai.hu/diary/Network_Institutions.html.

102 Artists from the following countries participated in Buda Ray University: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Cuba, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, (East) Germany, (West) Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States, Uruguay, Yugoslavia.

103 Galántai has curated such shows in thirteen countries, including France, Canada, the Netherlands, Italy, Ireland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. See Galántai, "Biography."

104 William S. Wilson in an email correspondence with Artpool, November 25, 2011. Wilson has published extensively on Johnson and amassed a singular archive on the artist.

Johnson and Galántai, like many artists in the mail art network, linked their geographical distance with the conceptual proximity of both artists' modes of thinking and creating artworks. Although far removed, "Ray" was metonymically tied to "Buda"pest, as Galántai was to Ray and the artists he included in Buda Ray University and Artpool's Ray Johnson Space exhibitions. They are yet another iteration of how the mail art network ameliorated an artist's sense of isolation, from Johnson's own hermetic correspondence course practices in a small town on Long Island (where he lived after 1968 until his suicide in 1995) to Galántai's sequestered existence in Hungary and continuous struggle with the authorities.

The political dimension of Galántai's artistic strategies was rewarded after 1989 when Artpool began to receive modest financial government support, official recognition that in Eastern Europe it instantiated the global network of experimental art and international artistic collaboration. Embracing mail art and samizdat publications as a perpetual bridge to artists worldwide, Galántai had remained a thorn in the eyes of the authorities, all the while being recognized internationally as an artist who altered artistic relations between Hungary and the world. "After all," Galántai stated, "you're never anyone in yourself [but] only [someone] as part of a network of relationships."[105] Galántai has held fast to his course.

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105   Stegmann, *Fluxus East*, 142.

This article has been cited by:

1. Juliane Debeusscher. Mediating Alternative Culture: Two Controversial Exhibitions in Hungary During the 1980s 161-188. [Crossref]
2. Katalin Cseh. 2014. Chained Bodies and Monuments of Hierarchy in Hungarian Performance Art. *Art and Design Review* **02**:04, 73-77. [Crossref]

A WINDOW AND A BASEMENT
NEGOTIATING HOSPITALITY AT *LA GALERIE DES LOCATAIRES* AND *PODROOM—THE WORKING COMMUNITY OF ARTISTS*

IVANA BAGO

Two examples of self-organized and experimental institutional practices of the 1970s are juxtaposed in this text: Podroom (Basement)—The Working Community of Artists, an artist-run space active in Zagreb from 1978 to 1980, and La Galerie des Locataires (The Tenants' Gallery), founded in 1972 by art historian Ida Biard in a Paris apartment but governed by fully "nomadic" postulates.[1] Podroom was started in 1978 by Sanja Iveković and Dalibor Martinis, who invited a number of colleagues to jointly transform their studio into an independent exhibition space, as well as a place where the artists would socialize, work, and discuss. Podroom opened in May 1978 with the group exhibition For Art in the Mind, involving twenty artists with whom Podroom would continue to be identified, although the project was not conceived on the basis of stable membership.[2]

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1   "Podroom" is an Anglicized spelling of the Croatian word *podrum*, which means "basement." The original name is *RZU Podroom* (*Radna zajednica umjetnika Podroom*), which I translate here as *Podroom—The Working Community of Artists*. Because of the pun implied by merging the Croatian word *pod*—(adv) under, (n) ground or floor—and the English word *room,* with its connotations of privacy or simply "space," I will use the original name and spelling throughout the rest of the text, instead of translating it into *basement*. Since the topic of hospitality is highly embedded within the question of language and translation, I will also keep the original name of *La Galerie des Locataires,* or use *the Galerie* as an abbreviation, instead of introducing the English translation.

2   The title of the show (not reached without contestation) was proposed by art historian and artist Josip Stošić, with the participation of the following artists: Boris Demur, Vladimir Dodig, Ivan Dorogi, Ladislav Galeta, Tomislav Gotovac, Vladimir Gudac, Sanja Iveković, Željko

Active for two years until the beginning of the 1980s, Podroom represents the culmination of the rich history of self-organized artists' initiatives in Zagreb during the 1960s and 1970s, and at the same time it marks the beginning of their dissolution through gradual (self-)institutionalization. This history was formed not by synchronous and separate stories, but ones that followed each other organically and chronologically, often involving direct links through individuals who made up the cores of various groups.[3] All these projects were based on temporary appropriations of nonart spaces where artistic activity was merged with everyday life: the street, the shop, a housing facility, a journal, and finally, in the case of Podroom, the studio—thus symbolically marking the end of the distinction between work *on* art and work *of* art. The history of these initiatives—which evolved in ephemeral communities of artists and intellectuals, with private and professional relations and interests among the members significantly intertwined—is also a history of alternative understandings of community, autonomy, public space, and audience.[4]

Although begun in a Paris apartment, La Galerie des Locataires belonged to the same historical and conceptual narrative that is, in turn, part of an international moment in the history of art. Nevertheless, its ties to the Yugoslav art scene and its markedly antibourgeois and anticapitalist mode of institutional critique are crucial for understanding this

Jerman, Željko Kipke, Antun Maračić, Vlado Martek, Dalibor Martinis, Marijan Molnar, Goran Petercol, Rajko Radovanović, Mladen Stilinović, Sven Stilinović, Josip Stošić, Goran Trbuljak, and Fedor Vučemilović.

3   From Gorgona and their exhibitions in the "Salon Šira" frame shop (1959–66), to one-day exhibition activities organized by Braco Dimitrijević, Nena Dimitrijević, and Goran Trbuljak in the doorway of 2A Frankopanska Street (1970–72), the street "exhibition-actions" of the Group of Six Artists (1975–79), and their samizdat journal *Maj 75* [May 75] (1978–84), to Podroom (1978–80) and the PM (Expanded Media) Gallery (1981–), the latter eventually becoming part of the mainstream institutional system. All the groups continued the tradition of male circles and male friendship, to which women often had access only through personal (sometimes also professional) partnerships with the male artists. As protagonists, women regularly appeared through exceptional individualistic agency, as is the case here with Ida Biard's practice and Sanja Iveković's position of "standing out" among Podroom's predominantly male group.

4   See Ivana Bago and Antonia Majača, "Dissociative Association, Dionysian Socialism, Non-Action and Delayed Audience: Between Action and Exodus in the Art of the 1960s and 1970s in Yugoslavia," in *Removed from the Crowd: Unexpected Encounters I*, ed. Ivana Bago, Antonia Majača, and Vesna Vuković (Zagreb: BLOK and DeLVe, 2011), 250–309. The present text is strongly informed by the collaborative process of researching, thinking, and writing in the framework of the *Removed from the Crowd* project, initiated by Antonia Majača and myself. I also thank Antonia Majača for her dedicated reading and commenting on this text.

unique, lifetime project of Ida Biard.[5] An art historian from Zagreb who lived and studied in Paris, Biard was simultaneously looking at and looking from the perspective of two different artistic and sociopolitical post-1968 contexts: that of a thriving neo-avant-garde art scene under the state patronage of Yugoslav self-managed socialism, on the one hand, and the increasingly spectacularized and privatized system of art galleries and institutions in the West, on the other.[6] La Galerie des Locataires is today perhaps best known for its collaborations with artists who would soon become leading protagonists of the Western European art scene of the 1970s, including Daniel Buren, Alain Fleisher, Annette Messager, and others. Its beginnings, however, are tied to the collaboration with Zagreb-based artist Goran Trbuljak, whose preoccupations at the time revolved around deconstructing the institutional and ideological preconditions of the system of art.

In this text, I propose a comparative reading of these two projects, Podroom and La Galerie des Locataires, mindful of the ways in which their protagonists went beyond the binary oppositions that defined their positions at the beginning: artist versus curator, institutionalization versus venue-free experiment, the individual versus collective, private versus public, host versus guest. My analysis will rely primarily on the existing textual records of how the protagonists themselves framed and conceptualized their aims and methods of work, articulating a radical distancing from the mainstream system of art at the time, challenging the imperative of visibility and accessibility, as well as conventional notions of audience. I will address the issue of work/labor as one of their key preoccu-

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5 It is symptomatic that a curatorial experiment (Želimir Koščević's "Exhibition of Women and Men," 1969), and not an artistic work, was selected to illustrate the show on Yugoslav art—Information sur le travail des jeune artistes Yougoslaves (1973)—in the gallery's brochure, as Koščević's experimental and politicized approach to curatorial and institutional practice is very much in line with Biard's own. See my text "Dematerialization of the Exhibition: Curatorial Experiments in Zagreb, Belgrade and Paris," *Curatorial Interventions*, a special segment guest edited by Lucian Gomoll and Lissette Olifvares, in *Viz. Inter-Arts*, ed. Roxanne Hamilton (Santa Cruz: University of California, Santa Cruz, in preparation).

6 For research on the link between self-management as official state policy and the field of contemporary art and its institutions, specifically the Yugoslav student centers as hubs of progressive artistic and curatorial practices, see Jelena Vesić and Dušan Grlja, "Two Times of One Wall: The Case of the Student Cultural Center in the 1970s," in *Political Practices of (Post)Yugoslav Art*, ed. Zorana Dojić and Jelena Vesić (Belgrade: Prelom Kolektiv, 2010). A previous version of this research, published in the framework of the exhibition SKC in ŠKUC, is available for download at http://www.prelomkolektiv.org/eng/PPYUart.htm, last accessed February 4, 2012. See particularly the discussion of the exhibition October 75, which explicitly proposed as its topic a critical analysis of the relations between art and self-management in Yugoslavia.

pations, situating it within the theoretical perspectives that define the crisis of Fordist labor in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as its resolution in the transition to the post-Fordist era with its emphasis on immaterial labor.[7] In the capitalist West, this transition is generally interpreted as a counterrevolution that appropriated and co-opted revolutionary requests and tactics of resistance of the youths', workers', and artists' protests of the 1960s and 1970s.[8] In the context of Yugoslav socialism, the economic reform of 1965 is usually cited as the crucial date from which we can follow increased liberalization and bureaucratization of the system of socialist self-management that brought it ever closer to capitalism and, indeed, its post-Fordist form.[9] In the contexts of both Western Europe and socialist Yugoslavia—albeit orchestrated by different dynamics whose nuances I will attempt to tackle—the dematerialization of the work of art during the 1960s and 1970s should therefore be seen as a symptom, if not an accomplice, of the dematerialization of work as such.

Since confronting all these questions involved primarily a search for autonomous and nonservile *spaces*—for art, work, and life—I choose to examine them here within an overarching conceptual framework of *hospitality* as discussed by Jacques Derrida.[10] The complexity of the challenges posed by the Galerie's and Podroom's decision for autonomy and solidarity can be related to Derrida's discussion of the "double bind" of hospitality, which reveals hospitality not as some benign gesture, but instead as a political project of great relevance.[11] In an era marked by

7   Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labour," trans. Paul Colilli and Ed Emery, available at http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcimmateriallabour3.htm, last accessed January 30, 2012.

8   See Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), and Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2007).

9   See Gal Kirn, "From the Primacy of Partisan Politics to the Post-Fordist Tendency in Yugoslav Self-Management Socialism," in *Post-Fordism and Its Discontents*, ed. Gal Kirn (Lulu.com, 2011), 253–302.

10 Jacques Derrida, "Hostipitality," trans. Barry Stocker with Forbes Morlock, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 5 (December 2000): 3–18.

11 Derrida bases his analysis of hospitality on the reading of *Perpetual Peace* by Immanuel Kant, who discusses the right of all men to "communal possession of the earth's surface" and the "right of a stranger not to be treated with hostility." Derrida, "Hostipitality," 5. Derrida's own reading relies, however, on ambivalence as the undercurrent of the concept and etymology of hospitality, the permeability between the guest (*hôte*) and host (*hôte*), as well as "the troubling analogy in their common origin between *hostis* as host and *hostis* as enemy, between hospitality and hostility." Ibid., 15.

increased (and by no means only voluntary) mobility, migration, and geo-political division of labor (its materiality and immateriality) when more and more space has been occupied by war, capital, and gentrification, posing the question of how to share, work with, and receive others in space—while in order to do that one must necessarily also be a master of space, that is, a host—yields no simple answers and requires constant negotiation.

In his film *Black Film* (1971) Želimir Žilnik took a group of homeless people home to his wife and child in Novi Sad, in a gesture/statement of assuming personal responsibility for homelessness—a taboo topic in the new society supposed to bring prosperity and happiness to all.[12] While the guests stayed at his home—and at the same time occupied the life and space of his own family against their will—Žilnik left in order to find a solution. He arranged meetings with social workers, randomly addressed people in the street, and asked the police if they might be able to do something. But it turned out that this common social problem was in fact nobody's problem. A radical confrontation with the double bind of hospitality in this film (in fact, a radical merging of the spaces of art and life, private and public) revealed that hospitality was not simply a matter of letting others in, but one that requires the host to abandon his or her own home in order to take action because the other's problem *is* also his or her problem.

I wish to propose that both La Galerie des Locataires and Podroom—The Working Community of Artists initiated similarly challenging processes for the negotiation of hospitality. They did so through their search for nonhegemonic ways to inhabit, occupy, and share space in order to achieve autonomous and nonservile forms of life and work. Such resistance to the subjugation to hegemonic power and also to its assumption implied a stubborn dedication to solidarity, and to the very double bind of hospitality that Derrida construes as an impossible and therefore necessary project.[13] The Galerie engaged in this project by mapping out a principle of hospitality that—taking a simple cue from one of its projects, *The French Window*—I will here describe through the metaphor of the *window*. This window principle entailed a nomadic pursuit of—to use Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's terminology—smooth space, a constant flight, and deterritorialization, evading and obstructing the paths

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12   I am grateful to Sanja Iveković for reminding me that this film is essential when discussing hospitality and art in Yugoslavia.

13   "If there is hospitality, the impossible must be done." Derrida, "Hostipitality," 14.

and flows of capitalist appropriation.[14] In an analogous testing of the potentiality of the name, I will place as the key vantage point of Podroom's project of hospitality the metaphor of the *basement*, whose form of resistance implied the occupation of a base that is more akin to the classical Marxist agenda of assuming control over the means and products of one's own labor. In what follows, I want to examine the steps this project entailed in both cases: first, *naming* a shared space as a way of summoning a desired future; second, *contracting* working relations that condition the community; and third, raising *thresholds* as a response to the breaking of the contract of hospitality—as a way of intensifying the impossibility of hospitality—the failure of which would finally result in the communities' dissolution.

INITIATORY ENCOUNTERS

In the case of both La Galerie des Locataires and Podroom, what made these processes possible were an encounter and a readiness to enter into discussion and allow for the constant shifting of individual boundaries and positions. A basic gesture of hospitality made such encounters possible in the first place: inviting—or simply allowing—others to enter one's living and working space.

> Encounter I: Paris, private apartment, 14 Rue de l'Avre, 1971:
> On the 8th of November I entered La Galerie des Locataires, 14 Rue de l'Avre, Paris. Without identifying myself (name-surname-profession-documentation), I posed the following question: Do you wish to exhibit this work in your gallery? The question could be answered by yes, no or maybe.[15]

The question and the three available answers were placed on a written form to be signed by the "anonymous artist" and the "gallery director." This is the textual part of the work that Goran Trbuljak made in the form of a survey conducted between October 1972 and February 1973 in both public and private galleries in Paris. The answer La Galerie des Locataires gave to Trbuljak's survey was affirmative. When she signed the form, the

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14 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), see esp. "1440: The Smooth and the Striated," 474–500.

15 Goran Trbuljak, reproduced in the online archive of La Galerie des Locataires, http://lagaleriedeslocataires.com/la_galerie_des_locataires/1/galerie.php, last accessed January 6, 2011, my translation.
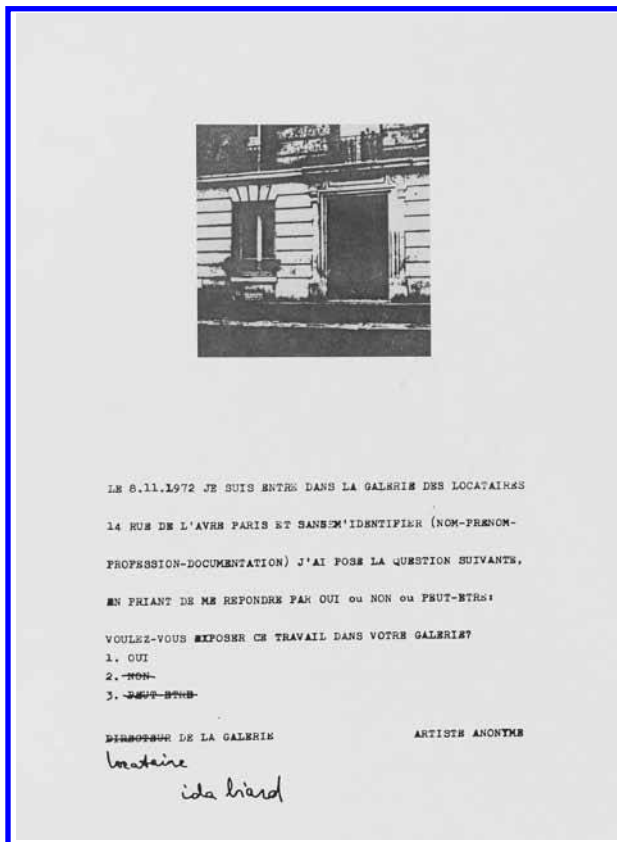
Goran Trbuljak. *8.11.1972*, 1972. La Galerie des Locataires, 14 Rue de l'Avre, Paris.
Image courtesy of Ida Biard and La Galerie des Locataires Archive.

Galerie's founder Ida Biard crossed out the word *directeur*, replacing it
with *locataire*, thus identifying herself as the gallery's tenant rather than
its director. This was surely not the first encounter between Biard and
Trbuljak, but I position it here as the symbolic, initiatory one that laid the
foundations for the Galerie's raison d'être: "The artist is anyone whom
others give the opportunity to be an artist."[16] In a number of his works
from this period, Trbuljak deconstructed the figure of the artist as the basis
for the mythology of authorship and originality. He never put art itself
in question, but rather called for the invention of "art without artists, with-

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16   Cited in *Simplon-Express* (exhibition catalogue) (Rome: Editioni Carte Segrete, 1989), 1, my
     translation, also available at http://lagaleriedeslocataires.com/la_galerie_des_locataires/6/
     galerie.php, last accessed January 20, 2012. This credo of the gallery quoted the title of
     another work by Trbuljak from 1971, a street referendum in which the citizens of Zagreb
     were invited to decide whether "Goran Trbuljak" was or was not an artist.

out criticism, without audience."[17] This eventually led him to conclude that what he had been producing were not artworks but "works-exhibitions."[18] Indeed, it was a curatorial position that Trbuljak appropriated when he exhibited "nothing" but surveys, forms, promotional posters, and catalogues—all parts of the bureaucratic and promotional machinery of exhibition. As Trbuljak himself put it, it was by what he did not do rather than by what he did that he might have been an artist.[19] Translating this principle into curatorial practice, the Galerie too opted for being a gallery by what it did not do, and not by what it did, insisting that it did not exhibit works but rather "communicated" them. By answering "yes" to the anonymous artist's question, La Galerie des Locataires committed to an impossible task: communicating the work of an artist who refused to be an artist and whose works were not artworks. This task would shape its entire mission: to construe a gallery as a space without walls, and one of lived experience; to renounce the system of art driven by spectacle and the market; to profess that an "outside" was possible; and to constantly invite others to join this pursuit.[20]

> Encounter II: Zagreb, basement studio, Mesnička Street 12, 1976–77
> Sanja [Iveković]: Concerning Martinis' and my experience with Podroom, it concerns the periods of '76 to '77, and only partly '78 (Spring), and then again '79 from February on. Although nothing happened here in '76 and '77, i.e., no exhibitions . . . , it was a significant time for me because that was when we started gathering around the idea of Podroom. We used to talk a lot, discuss, and argue about what should be the purpose and character of such a space—of a working community of artists. Then we made a concept of work and activities that would take place there (we still have written documents), etc. And later we met again, and talked again and argued.[21]

17   The quotation belongs to a text-based work by Goran Trbuljak reproduced in *Goran Trbuljak* (exhibition catalogue) (Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1973), n.p., my translation.

18   Goran Petercol, "Interview with Goran Trbuljak," *Studentski list*, January 23, 1981, 15, my translation.

19   Ibid., 15.

20   The axiom of the conventional institutional critique is that an "outside" position is impossible, that there is no outside; cf. Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," *Artforum* 44, no 3 (September 2005): 278–85.

21   Sanja Iveković, from a discussion published in *Prvi broj* [First Issue], samizdat (1980), n.p., translated by Hana Dvornik for the project *BADroom* by the collaborative performance collective Bad Co., conceived and originally staged in the framework of the project Removed

Artists preparing the first exhibition in Podroom—For Art in the Mind, May 1978.
Image courtesy of the Archive of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb.

This quote is taken from a discussion among the members of the Podroom initiative, recorded and published in their first—and last—issue of the "magazine-catalogue" *Prvi broj* (First Issue) in the beginning of 1980.[22] During the conversation, Sanja Iveković recalled a time when "nothing" happened, but during which heated discussions about the aims and potentials of an artist-run space had taken place. These early encounters, described as continued debates that did not yield a clear agenda, let alone consensus, were identified as a crucial precondition for all ensuing activities at Podroom. However, thirty years later, there does not seem to be a trace of the "written documents" that Iveković mentions, and that we might otherwise have compared to the "consent form" signed by La Galerie des Locataires and the anonymous artist.[23] Even when it documents what is symbolically their last—rather than the initial—encounter, the transcript of the cited discussion contained in *Prvi broj* is precious as it

from the Crowd, as a contribution to the exhibition Political Practices of (Post)Yugoslav Art, curated by Jelena Vesić (Belgrade, 2009).

22   Its name implied a serial character, and more issues were supposed to follow. However, shortly after publishing the first one, the Podroom experiment ended, after a common ground for continuing the project could no longer be identified.

23   As is often the case when witnessing prevails over forensic evidence, its protagonists' picture of what these initiatory talks and propositions were precisely about is no longer clear. I am referring here to Antonia Majača's and my conversations with Sanja Iveković, Vlado Martek, Dalibor Martinis, Mladen Stilinović, Branka Stipančić, and Darko Šimičić on the topic of Podroom. There were, however, many more protagonists involved, and the continuation of the research might bring missing documents or links to light.

remains the only document revealing, in the form of dialogue, the traces of the collective dynamics of the Podroom group and the ideas that shaped their work.

NAMING SPACE/CALLING FOR A FUTURE

As metaphors derived from the actual names of the projects discussed here, I propose to read the *window* and the *basement* as roadmaps for these projects' goals and strategies.[24] By the act of naming, one calls a desired future upon oneself (or on another).[25] Both names—La Galerie des Locataires and Podroom—The Working Community of Artists— evoke private spaces, spaces one inhabits either as a temporary home (as a tenant) or as a working space (one gathering a productive community). The name La Galerie des Locataires—The Tenants' Gallery—might lead us down the wrong path, however, as it automatically triggers the taxonomy of exhibitions and events organized in domestic spaces, whose history spans from the nineteenth-century salons to Moscow Apt-Art of the 1980s and the less-spontaneous, museum-organized Chambre d'amis (1986) project by Jan Hoet in Ghent. Any reading of La Galerie des Locataires will be enriched when seen in relation to this history, specifically the nineteenth-century salons that Robert Atkins considers key alternative spaces for the development of radical modernist practices, inciting both aesthetic and social transformations and involving the participation of different social classes.[26] These salons were mostly run by upper-class women, who in this way escaped from their own invisibility in the private and domestic sphere. Ida Biard, on the other hand, was not a landlady but a tenant; she was tied not to property but instead to precarity. The Galerie is then closer to the less narrated history of the "minor leagues," a term Renaud Ego adopted from Steven Rand to further conceptualize "communities without attachments" that are formed through withdrawal and refusal: "Is it a space? Yes, but not in the sense of having extent. It embodies an elusive (and therefore free) form of interconnecting relationships. Is it an alternative space? Yes, but more

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24   In the case of the "window," as already noted, it is in fact the name of one of the subprojects of the Galerie, *The French Window*; however, I will go on to show how the principle of "window" relates to the entire project of the Galerie des Locataires.

25   Derrida also reminds us of the unity of naming, calling, inviting, and bearing a name (calling oneself) in the German *heissen*. Derrida, "Hostipitality," 11–12.

26   Robert Atkins, "Alternatives and Aphorisms, Salon and Spectacle," in *Playing by the Rules: Alternative Thinking/Alternative Spaces*, Kindle ed., ed. Steven Rand and Heather Kouris (New York: apexart, 2010).

like a 'possibility.'"²⁷ A comparison with the motto of La Galerie des Locataires will prove the existence of such unattached yet strikingly connected players of the minor league: "La Galerie des Locataires is a state of mind. It manifests itself wherever it decides to be. It has no walls, and no decrees. It is not impossible."²⁸

Rather than bringing to mind a series of apartment events and exhibitions, the name of the gallery should trigger an entirely different image: it is the tenants who constitute the gallery, and wherever they go the community of its hosts and guests is formed. The very notion of the tenant is transient; in contrast to the owner, the tenant is only temporarily occupying/borrowing a space. The tenant is a permanent guest and a temporary host; free of the bounds of territory and possession, he or she is always ready to move on. And so even as the Galerie's activities happened inside an apartment, they took place in its special "compartment," *The French Window*, through which Biard and Trbuljak unlocked the Galerie, transforming it into an open invitation:

> The artists whose works (work + action) transcend the boundaries of the aesthetic and are rather situated in ethics are informed of the existence of FRENCH WINDOW. This space is exclusively oriented onto the street. The works will be presented in the order of their arrival to the address listed below. (*Art Vivant*, Paris, February 1973)²⁹

Duchamp's pun whereby he transformed the transparency of the "French window" into the opacity of the "fresh widow" was reversed once again. The Galerie opened itself "exclusively onto the street," and very soon its activities left the window to be spread and inserted like viruses into a diverse range of spaces and constellations. Its maneuvers were to be mapped by the postal network, a series of *postes restantes*—in Paris, Zagreb, Düsseldorf, Milan, Budapest, New York, Belgrade, Vancouver—serving as another series of multiplied and distributed "windows" that remained unconditionally open to artists' proposals. This curatorial approach defies conventional institutional preconditions not only because it is nomadic

27 Renaud Ego, "The Forest in the Clearing," trans. Robert Bonnono, in Rand and Kouris, *Playing by the Rules*.

28 *Simplon-Express*, 1. Note also the resolution to overcome impossibility, that is, to construe impossibility as possible.

29 The announcement was published in *Art Vivant*, cited in *The French Window* (Zagreb: Galerija Studentskog centra, 1973), n.p., my translation. The book credits the idea of the project to Goran Trbuljak, and the concept and realization to Ida Biard.

Jonier Marin. *Situation Panama*, project for *The French Window*, March 1973. Image courtesy of Ida Biard and La Galerie des Locataires Archive.

but also because it renounces the regime of selection, of the privilege of access. The Galerie counted on mutual recognition among the multitude of the minor leagues spread across the globe, who shared with it their ideas, work instructions, or simply notes expressing enthusiasm and support for the project.[30]

The Galerie "communicated" the artists' proposals through displays in the urban environment (*The Yugoslav Vitrine*, Zagreb, 1973); inserted itself into the program of the cinema, replacing the advertisements before film screenings (*Cinema Balkans*, Zagreb, 1974); invaded exhibition openings in private galleries by creating exhibitions within exhibitions

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30 Among the artists and art critics who were part of the Galerie's mailing network and activities were Gina Pane, Annette Messager, Daniel Buren, Sarkis, Alain Fleischer, André Cadere, the Zagreb and Belgrade Student Center galleries, László Beke, Petr Štembera, Paul Woodrow, Antoni Muntadas, Jan Dibbets, Christian Boltanski, Jiří Valoch, Josef Markulik, Renato Mambor, Radomir Damnjan, Katharina Sieverding, Endre Toth, Balint Szombathy, and Sztuki Aktualnej.

(André Cadere at Adami's opening at Maeght Gallery, Paris, 1973); and realized exhibitions and interventions in streets, markets, bathrooms, trains, and taxis of different cities. Even when it organized exhibitions in galleries, as in Another Chance to Become an Artist at the Student Center Gallery in Zagreb, the principle was the same: the invitation was a window, an opening, a possibility for *becoming*, for subjectivization to take place.

The Galerie's principle of hospitality was a window: it looked out; it owned no space and so it could not *receive* the way one did in a salon. Conversely—and paradoxically—in order to become a host, it constantly had to travel and visit, surprise those who did not expect it, manifest itself as a permanent guest and temporary host. And precisely because it didn't lay claim to the expertise regarding what or who was to arrive, the window remained open and anyone could become a *locataire*.[31] Even such hospitality, however, had its conditions: those invited were to locate their "work" and "action" in ethics, rather than aesthetics, but it was they themselves who were the judges of whether or not they fulfilled the requirement.

Similar principles of mutual recognition governed the laws of hospitality in Podroom—The Working Community of Artists. Although *podrum*, a basement, unlike the living space of a tenant, can also belong to a public institution, it nonetheless remains a private space. The basement is locked away from view: it's a threshold barred from guests and visitors, a secret *base* where things are stored, archived, and protected for potential future use.[32] This aspect of privacy, and especially of storing and nurturing, enables us to conceive of the basement also as a "female" space, in analogy with the Galerie's link to the nineteenth-century salons and its overall "minoritarian" belonging.[33]

Podroom too did not count on knowing who its guests would be. It gathered a more or less consistent group of people, but in principle anyone was welcome to cross the threshold and set another process in

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31   Derrida states that the "dimension of non-knowing," an act and intention "beyond knowledge toward the other as absolute stranger, as unknown, where I know that I know nothing of him," is essential in hospitality. Derrida, "Hostipitality," 8.

32   Of course, as is the case with any space, even the privacy of a basement in a public institution could be invaded, and its threshold transgressed, as was the case with the circle of artists in Prague (Petr Štembera, Karel Miler, Jan Mlčoch, and Jiří Kovanda) who used the basement of the Museum of Decorative Arts where Štembera worked as a night guard to organize clandestine after-hours performances and events for a small group of colleagues and friends.

33   Deleuze and Guattari conceptualize the "becoming-minoritarian," or "becoming-minor," as the primary mode of the subjectivation of difference, which subsumes all others: becoming-woman, -animal, -vegetable, and so forth. See "1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible. . . ," in *A Thousand Plateaus*, 232–309.

motion. The position of host was not fixed, as it was in the case of Biard who acted as a nomadic, singular host with a mission to "communicate" and in whom all the points in the network were connected. Podroom, by contrast, implied a horizontal disposition of hosts whereby the only point connected to all the others was the space itself rather than a singular agency. The question was then how to take responsibility for shared space without assuming sovereignty, or how to claim it—both individually and collectively—without making it one's own. Whereas the Galerie attempted to confront the problem of the estranged, deterritorialized individual of late capitalist society in the West, Podroom tried to tackle the socialist reterritorialization of collectivity and community in Yugoslavia, a country whose increasingly bureaucratized system of self-management was gradually losing ground, assuming a liberal and capitalist face.

Podroom's own community was a community of artists, and this is what constantly challenged its horizontality, for it implied the equality of goals and chances, and the existence of chances always implied competition:

> [Goran] Trbuljak: This is one difference between this and the one we had two years ago, because then we were already in the position that some of us had already exhibited at the Contemporary Art Gallery, some were still *aspiring* and so on. Now it seems to me that we're all alike in this respect, that we've been through this phase. Now there is *no more fight*, so to speak.
> [Dalibor] Martinis: Frustrations. . . .[34]

But absolute horizontality is never possible, and the members of a community will always form new alliances, agendas, and secret aspirations. Deleuze and Guattari identify this as a feature of the "war machine," drawing on Pierre Clastres's writing about tribes and clans who, through constant, and often violent, renegotiations of hierarchical positions, prevent the coming of State—a structured, centralized rule.[35] It is this resistance to the form of the state that is the permanently active enzyme within the Podroom organism. In a statement that he read during the Podroom discussion published in *Prvi broj*, Mladen Stilinović noted that he worked in Podroom because he alone wanted to be responsible for his work, and because he "didn't like going to court" (referring to one of his

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34   Goran Trbuljak and Dalibor Martinis, *Prvi broj*, n.p., emphasis added.
35   Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*; see "1227: Treatise on Nomadology—The War Machine," 351–413.

Željko Jerman. *My Space*, contribution to the catalogue *Works in the Basement*, a series of exhibitions conceived by Mladen Stilinović in Podroom, November–December, 1978. Image courtesy of the Archive of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb.

favorite quotes by Aretino that "life is when you don't have to go to Court").[36] On the rare occasions when Podroom artists addressed the "court," that is the state, by applying for support for Podroom's activities, they stressed that they did not form an official group or a "basic organization of united labor" (as the self-managed units of organized labor were called in Yugoslavia), and that they would rather receive funds individually, with each organizer personally responsible for her or his program.[37] By insisting that there was no such thing as a common program and yet stubbornly sharing the same space based on equality, Podroom tackled in its own way the very paradoxes of a socialist state that promoted the autonomy of self-managed units, yet headed more and more toward bureaucratization and centralization. By refusing all forms of a collective contract and by—if we recall its initiatory

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36   Mladen Stilinović, *Prvi broj*, n.p.

37   See "The Letter of the Working Community of Artists to the City of Zagreb's 'Self-managed Interest Community,'" February 16, 1979, Podroom Archive of Goran Petercol, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb. It should also be noted how the name "Working Community of Artists" tactfully appropriates the discourse of the bureaucracy of self-management, while trying to avoid official links with that same bureaucracy. I am grateful to Jasna Jakšić and the Museum of Contemporary Art for giving me access to these materials, which will also be made publicly available at http://www.digitizing-ideas.hr in the framework of the Digitizing Ideas project.

encounter—constantly meeting and arguing, but misplacing the meeting minutes and documents, Podroom tried to salvage the idea of self-management from its appropriation by the state and its bureaucracy. The document, or the "decree" as Biard called it, was placed in the drawer, not as a recipe, not as constitution, but merely a (lost) documentation of a node in the process of negotiating the conditions of hospitality, of inhabiting and sharing the same space.

In contrast to La Galerie des Locataires's nomadic singular agency, in Podroom's case it was the space that was the constant. This space was a basement, a base where everything arranged itself and gained ground. But it was also *under* ground, a zone where traces of encounters, ideas, discussions, work processes, and their various materializations were stored for future use. The space was open to the public, but in reality there was a group of artist-hosts, and a number of recurring guests-visitors. They all became publicly marked by the space: as if it were a stigma, they were referred to as *podrumaši*, the "Podroomers" or "basementists," with one art critic visualizing a group of artists somewhere deep in a mousehole.[38] The door could be opened, but it took a "basementist" to really recognize her or his tribe and wish to cross the threshold: "Petercol: Come in, come in . . . . Martinis: Enter! Sanja: Yes, please? X: Eeeh, no, no, no way. Dorogi: Who was that?"[39]

It was no one, a wrong number, because Podroom, just like the Galerie des Locataires, played in the minor league, in the game of *un*pleasing the crowd. They were part of the history and geography of those who "removed themselves from the crowd," a mental, temporal, and spatial movement for which there are numerous historical antecedents.[40] Its contours have become increasingly meaningful to us today as we form the lines of their "delayed audience," as Antonia Majača and I have described the way in which such audience-free constellations of people and events search for and form their public, always finding it in the future.[41] At the time when they evolved there was no audience, just the negotiation of a community. Boris Groys writes of the returning relevance of the "weak signs" of the avant-garde, and of a propensity for the low visibility of weak

38   Josip Depolo, "Goran Petercol," Podroom Archive of Goran Petercol, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb.
39   Goran Petercol, Dalibor Martinis, Sanja Iveković, and Ivan Dorogi, *Prvi broj*, n.p.
40   See Bago and Majača, "Dissociative Association."
41   Ibid., 280.

gestures in which participants and spectators coincide: "[O]ne can become a spectator only when one already has become an artist."[42] Similarly, the members of Podroom were not concerned with an audience or with their social isolation in the "mousehole," but rather with the very process of becoming and making sure that spectators were always also artists, that guests were always also hosts. Because everything began with the gesture of hospitality, the point when two artists invited others to test in practice the idea of an alternative social structure. If ever the group's members suspected that they themselves were assuming the logic of the state and becoming the despotic masters of their space, then Podroom would cease to have any purpose. Precisely this suspicion arose during their last meeting:

> [Goran] Petercol: However, there is another thing that seems to me very problematic, that we still act like a gallery for the artists we invite . . . we give them space, and through exhibiting here, they support the idea of Podroom. But then, this happens: when they make an exhibition, we have to wait until someone remembers to ask them whether they would come back and make another exhibition in a year or two or not. This is a kind of relationship typical of a gallery: what's offered is the space, and the honor to exhibit, but cooperation isn't on offer. *We should treat them on an equal basis.* . . . I think what happened here is a certain *accumulation of power* based on the past; that is, on the fact, the merit, that two years, a year and a half ago, we founded Podroom . . . and in addition to that, we own the space, that is, it so happened that we got the space.[43]

The space became a stumbling block; as Martinis warned, its *name* alone could not be the sole guarantee of its difference from business as usual.[44] A suspicion arose that despite the initial rejection of "documents," what was missing was some kind of contract, or a *common program* of action.[45]

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42 Boris Groys, "Weak Universalism," *e-flux journal* no. 15 (April 2010): n.p. This is not an elitist but rather a democratic idea, for, as Groys has shown, the radical reductionism of the avant-garde implies that everyone *can* indeed be/come an artist, and this is paradoxically why the avant-garde is unpopular among the "democratic audience."

43 Goran Petercol, *Prvi broj*, n.p. Emphasis added. The discussion about difference ends with Stilinović humorously locating it in the existence of a sink, as at least one certain piece of evidence that Podroom is also a "living space, and not a gallery," and on which everyone could agree.

44 Dalibor Martinis, *Prvi broj*, n.p.

45 "It's obvious that the space cannot and may not be what connects things. The Podroom should be a form of action." Ivan Dorogi, *Prvi broj*, n.p.

WORK AND ITS CONTRACTS

Podroom tried to tackle the impossible project of hospitality, the permeability of receiving and visiting, of hospitality and hostility. It is this "impossibility" that would reach its peak by the early 1980 and result in the group's dissolution. We can trace an analogous development with La Galerie des Locataires whose belief in radical openness and the rejection of rules also gradually faded. The following recollection of the Galerie's motivations embodies its founders' initial enthusiasm:

> We started to put precisely this in question, declaring for example that the work of art had become work/labor, that the walls of the galleries, of the museums had been replaced by other walls, those of the posts or train stations, places outside the system: the market stalls, the places of life. It is there that we went. We even tried organizing exhibitions that never materialized anywhere except in the mind, all in order to extract ourselves from the system.[46]

This kind of incognito art—for example, the "empty actions" of the Collective Actions in Moscow, the "invisible art" of Slobodan Tišma and Čedomir Drčma in Novi Sad after the state's repressive intervention at the Youth Tribune, Milan Knížák's "mind actions," and so forth—is often romanticized when articulating the forms of artistic resistance in ex-socialist countries, usually in order to reassert their totalitarian nature. However, in this case it was the totalitarianism of capitalism from which La Galerie des Locataires's camouflaged actions attempted to escape. This occurred in the era of the "communism of capital" whereby capital co-opted the means of resistance to materialist oppression and became itself immaterial, camouflaged, decentralized, and deterritorialized, shifting the surplus value from the object to knowledge and information.[47] We should note La Galerie des Locataires's enthusiasm for liberated, dematerialized work, work that merges into life. However, it is precisely the indistinction between labor and free time, the transformation of work into communication, that has become the trap in late, that is, cognitive, capitalism. Dematerializing the work of art and insisting on communication rather than representation has turned out to be just part of the problem. Indeed, already by the mid-1970s the Galerie and its founder Ida Biard witnessed

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46   See http://lagaleriedeslocataires.com/, last accessed February 5, 2012, my translation.
47   Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 113.

how easily the new, non-object-based art accommodated itself within the system. This had in fact been spelled out already much earlier, when the managers of Philip Morris, who sponsored Harald Szeemann's famous show When Attitudes Become Form, wrote in the show's catalogue that "innovation" and "experimentation" were indeed key elements linking the "new art" with the new business world and that this was why their company was committed to engaging in artistic activities not as "adjuncts to our commercial function, but rather [as] an integral part."[48]

We could read this statement by Philip Morris as a neo-avant-garde manifesto of corporate co-optation (and a counterpart to the more often cited co-optation of the avant-garde by the Soviet Communist Party and the socialist state). It is not surprising that Alexander Alberro quotes it precisely in order to illustrate the "contradictions of conceptual art" in the opening chapter of his study on the link between conceptual art, consumer society, and publicity practices of late capitalism.[49] Alberro, however, makes serious generalizations in asserting that the idea that conceptual art ever "sought to eliminate the commodity status of the art object"— but failed—was a myth.[50] Whatever the case in the United States may have been, certainly in Yugoslavia such a dissenting attitude toward commercialization and commodification of art was not a myth, but rather one of the engines of a significant part of artistic and curatorial production.[51] However, in cognitive capitalism, even the "mind" is no longer free from co-optation and exploitation, and so today Live in the Mind—the subtitle of Szeemann's show—or Podroom's exhibition For Art in the Mind— read less like revolutionary slogans and more like the dematerialized remnants of defeat.

In 1975, having become "[a]ware of the fact that the Galerie des Locataires was becoming just another breakthrough in the realization of an artistic career," the Galerie started casting doubt on its initial postulates of hospitality as it wrote once again to its artists in order to confirm its own

48   John A. Murphy, *When Attitudes Become Form* (exhibition catalogue), ed. Harald Szeemann (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1969).

49   Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 2.

50   Ibid., 4. According to him, this myth was heralded by Lucy Lippard in 1972 "when she lamented that the movement had rapidly capitulated to market forces and achieved commercial success." Ibid., 4.

51   Since the market did not exist in Yugoslavia except in some "emerging" form, such negativity was often directed toward the Western system of art and the threat of capitalist infiltration in Yugoslavia.

difference from business as usual.[52] Ida Biard asked the artists whether they saw the Galerie's noncapitalist principles as obstacles in the way of collaboration or whether, conversely, they found that the Galerie's oppositional stance could be transformatory not only for the art system but for society in general.[53] If the answer to the latter question, it was implied, were negative, then there would no longer be any reason for the Galerie to exist. With this letter, the gallery continued to provide individuals with opportunities to be/come artists, but now they were not offered unconditional trust on whether they fulfilled the conditions of "ethics and not aesthetics," and signatures on their artworks were no longer considered proof that they were indeed artists. Now a signature on a contract called Moral Contract was required:

> By signing this agreement, the participant is obliged to:
> —analyze the relation of the place where she/he exhibits with the work that is exhibited;
> —explain the aims of her/his interventions in the traditional exhibition venues.
> La Galerie des Locataires is obliged to:
> —remain an open field of communication;
> —intervene in the structures of existing relations between the artist and galleries.[54]

La Galerie des Locataires implicitly asserted that the pragmatic settling of relations between the contracting sides—as is usual in a contract—was irrelevant *if* a contract stating that the collaboration was based on shared ethical and ideological principles was signed. This is what makes this Moral Contract radically different from the much more famous contracts drafted in the same period by Seth Siegelaub and Daniel Buren. Their agreements regulated primarily the acquisition and resale of an artwork, and their very emergence signified that the relation between Western conceptual artists and the market had been intensified.[55]

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52   The letter to the artists proposing the Moral Contract; examples (and artists' replies) are available at http://lagaleriedeslocataires.com/la_galerie_des_locataires/2/galerie.php, last accessed February 5, 2012, my translation.
53   Ibid.
54   The text of the Moral Contract; examples are available at http://lagaleriedeslocataires.com, last accessed April 4, 2012, my translation.
55   For Seth Siegelaub's contract, see Alberro, *Conceptual Art*, 123–70. For Daniel Buren's contract, see Maria Eichhorn, "On the Avertissement: Interview with Daniel Buren," in *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. John C. Weichman (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2006).

Meanwhile in Yugoslavia, artists didn't have to deal with their co-optation by the art market since it did not exist; instead, they struggled with a system of state institutions—museums, awards, grants, acquisitions, the media—that continued to support, and view as art, only object-based, diluted modernism, and not the so-called New Artistic Practice, as neo-avant-garde and process-based, post-'68 practices in Yugoslavia were called.[56] Yugoslav youth—as the 1968 Belgrade student slogan "Down with the red bourgeoisie!" suggests—rejected both capitalism in the West and its disguised counterpart in Yugoslav society, which showed itself in increasing social differences and in the formation of a "red" upper class of bureaucrats and technocrats in a supposedly classless society.[57] The Podroom artists thus found themselves in an empty space—a basement—where the products of their work were neither destined for the market nor desired by socialist society, and could be only stored for a delayed audience, for future use.

In 1978, Mladen Stilinović conceived a month-long program consisting of a series of short exhibitions and events, titled Works in the Basement, in which the artists were invited to present works that explicitly dealt with the definition and value of artistic work/labor.[58] The project reflected on the one hand the obsession with the processuality of artistic work (processual painting was also affirming itself on the local scene at the time), but on the other hand Stilinović's long-term preoccupation with deconstructing the ideology of work in socialist Yugoslavia, and the figure of the worker as the builder of socialism. As I already noted, this ideology, formulated within the system of self-management—workers acquiring control over labor conditions and products—was undergoing a serious crisis at the time: not only in the sense that it was showing increasingly capitalist forms, but it literally turned a large part of the pop-

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56   This is not at all to suggest that such practices in Yugoslavia did not have institutional support. Quite the contrary. Institutions such as the Zagreb Gallery of Contemporary Art, the Belgrade Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Zagreb and Belgrade Student Center Galleries were crucial for continued organizational, theoretical, and promotional support of the "new art," as well as for establishing international contacts. But these institutions were in the minority and, together with the artists, formed a "common front" in opposition to mainstream art production that they considered bourgeois and complacent. For an early comprehensive overview, see Marijan Susovski, ed., *The New Art Practice in Yugoslavia 1966–1978* (exhibition catalogue) (Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1978).

57   See Kirn, "Primacy of Partisan Politics."

58   Example projects include The Artist Works Eight Hours a Day by Antun Maračić, Masterwork in Podroom by Ivan Dorogi, Conditions for Artistic Activity by Boris Demur, and Lines by Raša Todosijević. In 1979 Branka Stipančić curated the group exhibition Value, which focused specifically on the issue of the symbolic and monetary value of artistic work.

ulation into *guests* of the capitalist West—the guest workers, or *Gastarbeiter*, who left the country from the late 1960s as there was simply no work for them in Yugoslavia. In a way, Podroom was an experiment that tried to salvage the idea of self-management socialism, detaching it from the state and practicing it in a nonbureaucratized, anarchistic, and solidary way, almost like a secret operation taking place in a basement, even if it didn't promise success.[59]

The metaphor of an underground base where a plan of action is prepared construes Podroom as a form of potentiality, and even the one existing recorded conversation shows that Podroom signified a process of constant discussion of what it could be, rather than what it was. There seem to have always been two opposing visions between the members of the group, one that advocated self-sufficiency, autonomy (the "not-having-to-go-to-court" attitude), and the need to assume control over the means and products of labor—that is, literally over the *base* in Marxist terms; and another that claimed that Podroom should strive to be *more* than just artists—leave the factory, so to speak—so that the group would function like a base that coordinates a wider action on the level of cultural politics or, we might say, on the level of the *superstructure*. It was this conflict around whether such action would in fact eventually mean *more* or *less* that would finally lead to Podroom's dissolution in 1980:

> Sanja [Iveković]: For then it didn't seem enough to us that this space exists where we can exhibit our works, create our catalogues, etc. . . . And besides, it was also because the character of our work had changed, along with the sense of what constituted the role of artist today; in a way, we ceased to be merely "artists," and are starting to be something more than that. . . .
> [Mladen] Stilinović: Less.
> Sanja: More or less. In my opinion, it is more.[60]

However, even if most participants in the discussion probably opted for "less," Podroom and its Working Community were already perceived as dissenting voices that questioned the status quo of the cultural system and the ways it shaped the symbolic and economical relation of society

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59   Resistance to collaboration with the state and to any form of co-optation as the principle of Podroom's work—even when it entailed "no gain"—can best be summarized by another statement by Stilinović: "The conditions of my work are not in my hands, but luckily they are not in yours either."

60   Sanja Iveković and Mladen Stilinović, *Prvi broj*, n.p.

Prvi broj (First Issue), Podroom's catalogue-journal, cover and inside page, February, 1980.
Image courtesy of the Archive of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb.

to their work. Podroom's members produced art that questioned the value of artistic work; coordinated actions that challenged the functioning of large exhibitions such as the yearly "Youth Salons"; and in their interviews and texts—published primarily in the student press of the time—pointed to the lack of space for their work and its presentation, its denigratory treatment by the mainstream media, and the artists' precarious financial status. Unlike La Galerie des Locataires, which stubbornly charted avenues leading outside of the system, the Working Community of Artists was essentially a community of artists whose work was also supposed to be their profession. Remaining in the basement, on the margins, therefore meant permanent economic, and not only social, isolation.[61]

The aim of the magazine-catalogue *Prvi broj* was to reflect on the past and future of the Podroom initiative but also on the relation between artists and the immediate sociopolitical context determining the condi-

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61   This was explicitly pointed out by Stilinović in *Prvi broj*, when the issue of isolation was discussed, and by Boris Demur, who warned that one should think of infiltrating the galleries as an economic system, instead of remaining within a romantic idea of culture. *Prvi broj*, n.p.

tions of artistic production.[62] The artists' textual contributions dealt with censorship and with the lack of professionalism of the media and institutions (Stilinović), the complicity of the artist in maintaining the status quo (Marijan Molnar), the relationship between material and immaterial artist labor and its value (Boris Demur), and the artists' low income (Željko Jerman). As if to respond to all these issues, Sanja Iveković and Dalibor Martinis drafted a proposal for a *contract* that aimed to regulate the financial and other practical responsibilities of the artist and of the institution that presented her or his work. Again, unlike Siegelaub's and Buren's contracts, theirs didn't concern an exchange in the form of a sale, but rather the exchange of mutual responsibility for the public value of the artist's work, which was here conceived as a *common good* shared through public institutions with the wider community. This is how the artist was to earn her or his salary.[63]

THRESHOLDS

Both Podroom's *Contract* and La Galerie des Locataires's Moral Contract were expressions of the need to raise the thresholds of hospitality. It was no longer enough to leave the window and the basement open or to welcome and receive guests in the order of their appearance. Instead, it became clear that, even though the door would remain unlocked, the threshold needed to be clearly visible.[64] The introduction of a contract—both literally and in the symbolic sense of requiring consensus over a common program of action—began the process of dissolution for communities that had been created through the merging of work and life and through shared resistance to "documents" and "decrees." Both Podroom's and La Galerie des Locataires's contracts posed a challenge, implying that it was perhaps necessary to do *more* than just resist, and that this "more" required a clearly defined, solidary action. However, the challenge seemed to be too great, and this fact reflected the challenges faced by the resistance movements of the 1960s and 1970s and their subsequent co-optation. Paolo

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62   Sanja Iveković and Dalibor Martinis proposed the idea for the launching of a magazine as an "additional form of action," and whose editorial team consisted of Sanja Iveković, Mladen Stilinović, and Goran Petercol. Other contributors included Željko Jerman, Vlado Martek, Marijan Molnar, Antun Maračić, Branka Stipančić, Goran Trbuljak, Ivan Dorogi, and Boris Demur.

63   Naturally, such a concept of the value of artistic work can also easily be co-opted by society, by the community, or by the state, but today it seems once more highly relevant to insist on defining, and working toward, a common good.

64   According to Derrida, "[F]or there to be hospitality, there must be a door. But if there is a door, there is no longer hospitality." Derrida, "Hostipitality," 14.

Virno stresses the underlying "communist inspiration" of the movements expressed in their nonsocialist, indeed antisocialist, demands: "radical criticism of labor; an accentuated taste for differences, or, if you prefer, a refining of the 'principle of individuation'; no longer the desire to take possession of the State, but the aptitude (at times violent, certainly) for defending oneself from the State, for dissolving the bondage to the State as such."[65] All these "inspirations" were at work at the Galerie and at Podroom alike as their own modes of resistance were constantly under threat of being co-opted by the coming "communism of capital."[66]

Despite the fact that a number of artists responded to La Galerie des Locataires's questionnaire and signed the Moral Contract, the Galerie had to face the reality that an artist's signature still carried more weight as a warranty of authorship for a work of art than as a commitment to a certain work principle. In its own approach to work and collaboration with artists, La Galerie des Locataires was itself entangled in the net of post-Fordist conditions of labor. In contrast to the Podroom artists who occupied the factory to regain control over its production, the Galerie functioned as an outsourced contractor that produced artists' works according to certain instructions. However, the works' surplus value remained attached to the institution of artistic authorship and its signature, that is, to the "brand" that produced the idea. It is no coincidence that there were many instances in which the contractual mechanism of the signature came to the foreground in the activities of La Galerie des Locataires. One example was a project with Sarkis, who in 1974 authorized Ida Biard/the Galerie to forge his signature and reproduce it anywhere it deemed appropriate during one year. Although the Galerie had full creative freedom to experiment and take control over this process, the results and the placement of the product—creative investment on all levels being the mark of post-Fordist, immaterial labor—the Galerie's labor was in the end literally invested in reproducing and multiplying a brand, the logo of artistic authorship.

Ida Biard's curatorial practice radically merged the artistic and the curatorial through constant shifting and translation; however, it could not move beyond the surplus value of the artist's signature. In 1976 La Galerie des Locataires therefore pronounced a *Strike* by sending a "farewell letter" to its artists:

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65 Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 113.
66 Ibid.

> In order to express its disagreement with the conduct of artists/so-called dissenters and the avant-garde within the current system of the art market, LA GALERIE DES LOCATAIRES is on strike and will not communicate any work/so-called artistic as of the 7th of March 1976.[67]

The conditions of hospitality had been violated as the "other side" was judged to be no longer following the Moral Contract. The window was closed.[68]

At that point the threshold that was raised and intensified was the impossible project of hospitality itself, which had marked both the Galerie and Podroom from the outset. Spectators were invited to become artists as guests were invited to become hosts and the original hosts left to search for new spaces. In one of the events held in the Podroom space, Vlado Martek invited Ješa Denegri—the art critic, curator, and one of the key theorists and promoters of the Yugoslav New Art Practice—to give a talk. Denegri came, but Martek wasn't there and the talk couldn't begin.

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67   Reproduced in *Simplon-Express*, my translation.
68   Another interesting example of a strike—or an invitation to an international strike—was proposed and distributed through a mailing network in 1979 by the Belgrade artist Goran Đorđević (*International Strike of Artists*). It is interesting that most artists from the West declined the invitation, considering Đorđević's attempt naive. It is precisely this naiveté, a stubborn belief of many Yugoslav artists that an "outside" was possible, that is the undercurrent also of the Galerie de Locataires's strike.

After thirty minutes of awkward expectation, Stilinović felt pressured to take responsibility and become the host for a guest whose authority—and the fact that he lived in Belgrade and couldn't therefore simply stop by another time—made the visit exceptional. The next day, when he was asked for an explanation, Martek admitted that what occurred had been the planned scenario for the event.

As he plays with the etymology of the term "hospitality," the ambivalence between guest and host, hostility and hospitality, Derrida frames the host as hostage: "The one inviting becomes almost the hostage of the one invited, of the guest [*hôte*], the hostage of the one he receives, the one who keeps him at home."[69] In Martek's reversal of the equation, the guests became the hostages of the missing host.

This (undocumented) action may sound like an anecdote,[70] but in fact it illustrated the impossible project of hospitality that took shape in Podroom. It seemed to provide Goran Petercol's question—how to treat the invited guests like equals, how not to be the sovereigns of space—with a possible answer: invite them and then leave. The action also mirrors Podroom's beginnings when Sanja Iveković and Dalibor Martinis, almost immediately after opening up their studio to other artists in May 1978, left as visiting artists and guests of another artist-run space—the Western Front in Vancouver, Canada.

Iveković and Martinis weren't kept hostage in Zagreb by the guests they had invited because those guests were invited precisely in order to become hosts themselves.[71] However, they were kept hostage by their responsibility for instigating the project of hospitality, and, in this sense, they were still the "primary" hosts. A year after their return from Canada, Iveković and Martinis ended the project. In February 1980 they sent a letter to the Podroom Working Community, informing them of the decision to revert the space back to its initial purpose (their studio). The reasons they gave referred to the *hostility* of several Podroom members (cohosts) toward a series of ideas and projects that Iveković and Martinis had proposed or realized in Podroom:

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69   Derrida, "Hostipitality," 9.

70   It is recounted here based on a conversation with Mladen Stilinović.

71   In fact, the actual programs that took place in Podroom were mainly conceived and realized by other members of the group, not Iveković and Martinis, partly due to their absence. They returned in February 1979, after which they gave a talk about their research, presenting the self-organized artistic initiatives they had visited in Canada, which had informed their own idea concerning the potential of an artist-run space.

Our engagement with organizing the talk with the Canadian artist group CEAC caused severe criticism and allegations that we had *usurped power* within Podroom by organizing the event that didn't have support by all RZU members. At the same time most members advocated that *each member was free* to organize, invest his own effort and be responsible for any action, exhibition, or manifestation.[72]

The CEAC talk was organized in June 1978, before Iveković and Martinis left for Canada, so it can be inferred that the moment of their departure coincided with a moment when the contract of hospitality ensuring harmonious and "free" relations in the community had seriously been put to the test. According to the letter, this hostility was reactivated once they had returned, culminating in 1980 with *Prvi broj*, because Iveković, as designer of the magazine, didn't sign the textual and visual "interventions" that she inserted in its pages.[73] The "community of the unsigned contract" thus fell apart over a lacking signature, which was seen as the imposition of unwanted collective ownership and responsibility. The double bind of hospitality in this way fully unraveled itself, in an acknowledgment of the presence of the ghost of hostility, which reasserted a clear distinction between hosts and guests, now perceiving each other as a threat.

Podroom's symbolic contract had been violated, and the proposal of a concrete contract (the one by Iveković and Martinis) only raised the thresholds. For this contract should be read as an attempt to regulate not only the artists' relations with the state, but also the relations within their own community. It could be put into practice only through the artists' solidarity, which was, in turn, constantly threatened by their "particular interests."[74] And so the contract was never signed; it was placed in a drawer as yet another potentiality, a documented node in the process of the negotiation of hospitality, of the border between the individual and common ground.

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72   Letter to the members of RZU Podroom, February 26, 1980, Podroom Archive of Goran Petercol, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, emphasis added. CEAC is the Center for Experimental Art and Communication, an artist group and space founded in Toronto in 1975 by Amerigo Marras, Bruce Eves, and Ron Gillespie, which was forced to close in 1980 because their activities were deemed radical and they were accused of promoting the overthrow of authority.

73   It is not indicated what precisely is meant by this, but we can assume that the photograph of a woman with a raised fist and the text, "I advocate a new legislation on independent artists," was certainly one of them, and probably also some newspaper cutouts quoting state rhetoric about the relevance of art in socialist society.

74   As can be inferred from the discussion in *Prvi broj*, it nominally received the support of most members; however, the artists jokingly admitted that they would probably forget about it as soon as they were offered participation in the next exhibition by an institution.

Discussion with the Canadian artist group CEAC in Podroom, June 1978.
Image courtesy of Dalibor Martinis.

GROUND

The conflict, however, implied not merely the selfish needs of individual members, the constant pressure of competition, but also the different battles that needed to be fought in the relation between art and society, and the uncertainty about how to fight these battles. Asking whether art can do more, or whether it rather, by trying to do more, in fact ends up doing less, necessarily evokes another impossible project, that of autonomy, and its own double bind. Co-opted by institutions and the corporate sector, (some) artists in the West sought autonomy by joining the civil movements or activist initiatives or, as in the case of La Galerie des Locataires, simply searching for "an outside" of the (art) system. In the socialist countries where art was (nominally) not seen as a private act but as a common good participating in the shaping of society, artists fought for autonomy within art, trying to liberate it from the remnants of the ancien régime. In search for the right mode of struggle, La Galerie des Locataires chose the strategy of the nomad, the principle of the window: it occupied and inhabited space through constant distribution and deterritorialization, leaving behind no certain traces.[75] Podroom's principle, on the other hand,

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75   This is how Deleuze and Guattari conceive of the nomadic or smooth space. See "Treatise on Nomadology" and "1440: The Smooth and the Striated" in *A Thousand Plateaus*. It is worth noting, however, that for Deleuze and Guattari, the nomad is not the same as the migrant, nor is it characterized by movement; it concerns first of all deterritorialization and a distribution in space, a distribution that occupies space, but leaves no certain traces in a way.

was that of the basement: occupying and inhabiting the *same* space—and occupying precisely through sharing. Their inhabitation of space was sedentary, but not in the Deleuze-Guattarian sense where the sedentary, striated space—in contrast to the nomadic, smooth space—is always linked to a "state apparatus" or a "property regime."[76] Podroom's sedentary occupation of space was not hegemonic, but based on solidarity, even when it involved no common program of action. However, it also rejected invisibility, it wanted its presence to be clearly marked.[77] Today, when more and more space is ravaged by perpetual violence, exploitation, and privatization, and when the key word for global resistance movements is occupation—involving *sit-ins*, *squatting*, and *stubbornly staying in place*—we should reconsider the power of the sedentary.[78]

Many of the Podroom artists in fact literally came to Podroom from invisibility, "from the street," where their actions and interventions were scattered around squares, parks, and buildings. They became "Podroomers" only when they acquired a base, when they became a potential threat that could always leave the mousehole, even without a clear agenda or common program. Although relatively short, the Podroom experience can in retrospect be said to have been crucial for the founding of the "Expanded Media" section within the Croatian Society of Visual Artists that accepted for the first time as members artists with no academic background, and in the framework of which the artist-run PM Gallery (Expanded Media Gallery) was founded, albeit within a state institution (which affected its gradual institutionalization).

Occupying a base also meant drawing a border. Because, as Marina Gržinić notes, when everything can be co-opted by limitless inclusion

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76   The sedentary space is characterized by walls, borders; the sedentary relation to space is always mediated by something pertaining to the state apparatus. However, they again complicate the matter by stating: "[T]he nomad moves, but while seated, and he is only seated while moving," using precisely the metaphor of sitting to describe the nomadic distribution in space. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 381.

77   It is easy to relate these strategies to the present prevalence of resistance as occupation. See, for example, McKenzie Wark's comment on Occupy Wall Street, where he reminds us that OWS is not a movement since "[a]n occupation is conceptually the opposite of a movement," and states the anarchic character of occupation, in contrast to the movement, which requires a common program, or "internal consistency." McKenzie Wark, "How to Occupy an Abstraction," http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/728, last accessed February 5, 2012.

78   It is symptomatic that this turn is also synchronous with the renewed interests in objecthood, thus completing the reversal of the preoccupation with both the nomadic and the dematerialized as forms of resistance. See, for example, Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle, "Editorial," *e-flux Journal* no. 15 (April 2010), or the introduction of the term "forensic aesthetics" by Eyal Weizman (for example here, within a project itself called *The State of Things*: http://www.oca.no/programme/audiovisual/the-state-of-things.2).
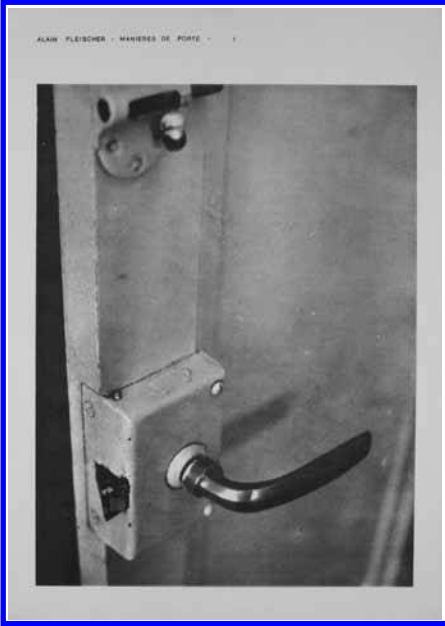
Alain Fleischer. *Manières de porte I*, 1973–74. Print on paper, 29.7 x 21 cm. Acquisition from the collection of Ida Biard—La Galerie des Locataires. Property of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb.

and endless exchange, "[i]n order to act it is necessary to draw a border. To draw a border within the inconsistency of the big Other, within the limitless inclusion means to act, to act politically."[79] This was precisely what La Galerie des Locataires did when it pronounced its strike, lasting from 1976 to 1982. In the 1980s, the Galerie resumed its activities but at a much slower pace and more cautiously, aware of the traps of unlimited inclusiveness and borderless expansion. The decision to end the strike showed that the Galerie remained a believer, certain that art *could* be more, regardless of whether this was achieved by doing "more" or "less." Today, La Galerie des Locataires finds one of its own bases on the Internet, in the form of an archive, of which its founder Ida Biard writes, "And of all those things—the *traces* are here. They were not—promises. I consider them seeds planted in the ground."[80]

So once again we are back in the ground: the planted seeds, the filed agendas of common action, the lost documents, the unsigned contracts; the unvalued labor; in the ground, under ground, gaining ground, waiting for a movement that is to touch base. And merge impossible and necessary pursuits past and present.[81]

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79   Marina Gržinić, "Art, Activism and Theory," in Rand and Kouris, *Playing by the Rules*.
80   http://lagaleriedeslocataires.com/textes.html, last accessed January 19, 2012, emphasis added, my translation.
81   In 2008 the Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home, run out of a council property bedroom in Everton, Liverpool, UK, sent a key to their home to the curators of an exhibition in Zagreb (The Salon of Revolution, curated by Ivana Bago and Antonia Majača, HDLU [Croatian Association of Visual Artists], Zagreb, 2008). Since there were not sufficient funds to invite the institute to realize the work they had proposed for the exhibition, they delegated the realization of this work to the curators, who were to make sixty-eight copies of the master key and hang them on sixty-eight nails hammered into the wall so that together they would form the word *Utopia*. Visitors to the exhibition were invited to take one of the keys and enter the institute's home in Liverpool at any time. There, it wouldn't be necessary to announce oneself: nobody would come to answer the door since those who held the key were not guests but hosts. In the end all sixty-eight keys were taken, and, to this day, nobody has arrived. Some keys might have been lost, others thrown away, and some placed in the drawer as evidence, in (the) case of negotiating hospitality.

INVISIBLE ARTISTS, OR
THE NET WITHOUT A FISHERMAN . . .
(MY LIFE IN MAIL ART)

GRACIELA G. GUTIÉRREZ MARX

GGMarx, *Artist's Stamp*, 1978, 2012. Courtesy of Graciela Gutiérrez Marx.

In the rivers, even the contaminated, there is always sediment: organic remains and residuals that fertilize new cultivation. As Octavio Paz once remarked, only industrial waste is perverse, because it doesn't degrade and therefore never gives rise to a new creation. I belong to an (artistic) trend of global poetic exchange-at-a-distance that peaked between the 1960s and 1990s. If we search for beginnings, this history can be traced to the fourth century BC, but I would prefer to situate it as a derivate of Dada and link it to Fluxus and the highly innovative poetry practiced in poor areas of the Southern Cone of South America. In a broader and ideologically more sensitive context, the popular struggles in the country-side (Cuba, Chile, Bolivia, Peru, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Uruguay, Colombia, Ecuador, Argentina . . .) and the liberation movements have marked the direction of my life to the present day.

"Arte Correo" (the particular way of saying "mail art" in the Caribbean and in the current region of the Mercosur/UNASUR) has left its mark on all of us: on those who know each other and those who we suspect still form a fraternal network that spans the globe. We lived a temporarily asequential and spatially dislocalized "We," practicing nobly diverse genres and types of activity, but with marvelous possibilities for brotherly correspondence.

Without directors, critics, patrons, nor an official history that some-one could dare to raise up or claim to own, mail art has been and is an

<div style="writing-mode: vertical">GUTIÉRREZ MARX | INVISIBLE ARTISTS</div>

art bound to life. As a result, all of this material of exchange is alive, and for that same reason it runs the risk of death by disappearance, execution, revilement—or a resurrection by transformation.

As a practitioner and head of an archive of ephemeral works, I am building diverse dispositions that have their own marginal character. I always work in a collective, and therefore both the works and their organization are open and rhizomatic: processes of co-creation that always remain unfinished.

I am from the 1960s. I studied at Bellas Artes (the National University of La Plata) for the bachelor's degree, and finally I joined the faculty. They called us "the ugly ducklings": we witnessed the birth of rock and roll, and read—between the ages of sixteen and twenty—Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Cortázar, Neruda, and the Popol Vuh. We discovered the immeasurable in the films of Federico Fellini, the ineffable in Bergman and Antonioni; the *nouvelle vague* ensconced us in the darkness of the generational abyss. . . .

For us, Paris was still the center of the art world, and all of us wanted to go there. In 1962, the "SI" group was born in La Plata. It was a window opening to independent experimentation that had no place in the art school of the National University of La Plata, in spite of the presence of some artist-professors who had been trained in Europe in the 1950s and who broke with longstanding academic principles. Being almost neoclassicists and rather Romantic, they espoused the idea of genius (by birth) and of transcendental inspiration. At the Department of Philosophy and Aesthetics headed by Manuel López Blanco—of whom I had the privilege of being a student and assistant for seven long years of exceptional apprenticeship—the aesthetics of Benedetto Croce were buried and we were introduced to Hegelian theories, to phenomenological and semiotic thinking, by which we entered new levels of possible consciousness.

I studied sculpture with Aurelio Macchi, a disciple of Zadkine. I wanted to emulate Giacometti, with all the respect that was possible for me, and after some years, I made the audacious move of constructing ensembles of bits of scrap metal, sewn together with flashes of fire and splashes of lava. I was awarded some important prizes, and in 1968 and 1969 I had an exhibition at Lirolay Gallery of Buenos Aires, which at that time functioned as an entrance to the "Ver y Estimar" prize. This being the state of things, they invited me to take part in the Di Tella Institute, which I frequented regularly. However, before I was able to enter, the dictatorship led by General Ongania closed the institute.

Simultaneously, Fidel's Cuba and Che Guevara lit the torches for the creation of a different world, including the project of a "new man." The French May of 1968 gave us courage. The so-called Cordobazo served as an example, and the popular movements were including us, one by one, in the hopes of bringing about a transformation.[1] I already knew that in art it wasn't the galleries, the market, or the prizes that I was interested in. I preferred to face other types of difficulty. I didn't want to be "somebody," nor to produce eternal works of art. Instead the processes of collective creation began to draw me in.

It was necessary to dig deeper and search for something that I didn't yet know, something that was not well-known to me but that was, nevertheless, waiting for me, just around the corner where doors would open for me to go and play. It was then that I became intimately acquainted with Edgardo A. Vigo, and from his mouth I heard the word "mail art," which was related to new forms of concrete poetry: process poems, visual poetry, action poetry.

About halfway through the 1970s, Horacio Zavala handed me the key to *Artecorreo* (the name coined for mail art in Argentina) by sending me

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1   The Cordobazo was a civil uprising in the city of Córdoba, Argentina, at the end of May 1969, during the military dictatorship of General Juan Carlos Onganía.

an invitation to an exhibition of rubber stamps, organized in the Netherlands by Ulises Carrión. I became part of the mail exchange lists ("communication at a distance via the mail") that had already helped create several interactive networks. In 1975 the first mail art show took place in Buenos Aires (organized by Vigo and Zavala). Tellingly it was called ÚLTIMA (last). At this exhibition the "State Intelligence Services" already began exercising censorship, an activity that soon turned into repression. On March 24, the terrorist state was inaugurated by a military junta.

One July morning in 1976, at the sculpture studio at Bellas Artes, a fugitive student told me about the disappearance of his friends from his bachelor's degree class—my own students—and of that of the son of Edgardo A. Vigo, Abel or "pigeon," as we tended to call him.

There were many more disappearances. The city of La Plata, a university city par excellence, transformed itself into a nocturnal execution field, complete with inspections that included boot kicks and rifle shots, into doors and windows. In this scenario of bloodshed on sidewalks, on balconies, and in parks, I was expelled from the university and fired from the work that I was doing for the Ministry of Culture and Education. My conduct was viewed as a problem for "national security."

On August 22, 1977, Edgardo Vigo proposed that we work together using a joint signature and name (G.E. MarxVigo) to give us more strength. That's how we entered into an *aesthetic marriage* that lasted until 1983. Appointments, meetings, marginal publications, visual poetry, alternative graphics, wood engravings, declarations, and poetic-political platforms (all of them circulating by mail) represented our chance to continue being active and to reconstruct ourselves metaphorically, amid a horrific political landscape. We, like others, were "the disappeared living," and we continued to live thanks to the international network that had already shown its solidarity and strength when it managed to free Clemente Padín and Jorge Caraballo from a Uruguayan prison.

The images that I remember best, as I formulate this declaration of love for global brotherhood, are the following: the project sketches for *Fusion and Accompanied Flight*, *The Appointments*, or *Spring Rituals* on the banks of the Rio de La Plata and at the beaches of Boca Cerrada; the installations of popular altars—the banners and burials of our own remains.

With the turn to so-called democracy, we separated, and the flags of "G.E. MarxVigo" were lovingly rolled up.

In 1984 I reclaimed my identity as "GGMARX" by applying what I had learned from my participation in the mail networks, and creating a

new street network among the inhabitants of my city. That is how the *Projects of Collective Creation* came about: the *Clothesline for History*, the *Marathon of the Antiheroes*, the *Poem-Pamphlet*, and the *Editions of Confusion*. I also founded the Association for the Unloved Earth.

Together with the CAPATACO group, the Association of Argentinean Actors, and followers of our trends from other countries, where some of our projects originated, we participated in many *action art* events: El Teatrazo, Shadows of Hiroshima, A Votive for Chile, Bicycles to China, and Missing Political Figures for Our America.

Between 1985 and 1986 we published five issues of a marginal periodical that was self-managed by Hilda Paz, Gustavo Mariano, Daniel Glüzmann, Gabriela Hermida, Alfredo Mauderli, Susana Lombardo, Juan Ferreira, Martín Eckmeyer, Mamablanca, and myself. It was called *HOJE- HOJA-HOY*. I still reprint it with the same name in different formats and media each time I am asked to give seminars or talks concerning the history of mail art.

In 1989, with the promise of a false "productive revolution" that was designed to let Argentina enter *the first world*, our actions couldn't continue any longer. The *street* became deserted and the practices of collective creation were deactivated. At that time they installed stamping machines at the post offices. The postal workers quit delivering metaphors and started to silently slip the envelopes with invoices and taxes under people's doors. Today almost all of our comrades from the mail art networks, of those old days, are connected to the Internet. I refused to come online until the year 2000. Then Martin Eckmeyer (my son) used two magic tricks on me. First he gave me a box of colored pencils so that I would draw like when I was a little girl; and then he bought a computer to introduce me to this "virtual world." This is how I began to assimilate to this new version of mail art.

I have never abandoned the marginal practices and fraternal spirit of the networks. In 2010 I edited a book titled *MAIL ART = Invisible Artists in the Postal Network*. Thanks to the cooperation of old comrades, who are still alive and who dug up their treasures, the book has been distributed all around the world. Today I work in Galpón de la Loma's mail art archive, while at the same time I pursue projects that I consider part of my nature: *Corresponding Biographemes*.

TRANSLATED BY JENNIFER PETERSON GARNIER

MEDIA ART IN ARGENTINA
IDEOLOGY AND CRITIQUE
"DESPUÉS DEL POP"

KAREN BENEZRA

INTRODUCTION

Formed at the University of Buenos Aires's College of Letters and Philosophy in 1965, the Argentinean Media Art Group (Grupo Arte de los Medios) took shape amid the creative and commercial effervescence of the capital's experimental art scene, often articulated through and against the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella's Center for Visual Arts (CAV).[1] Formed by the literary critic and philosopher Oscar Masotta, the group claimed to redefine the social scope of avant-gardist practice for the visual arts amid the growth of consumer capitalism, the influence and ubiquity of the mass media, and the irrepressible manifestations of social divisions once held together by Peronist hegemony.[2]

As noted in the group's manifesto, its call for art's disappearance was as much a rejection of the sensorial immediacy of the happening as it

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[1]   See John King, *El Di Tella y el desarrollo cultural argentino en la década del sesenta* (Buenos Aires: Asunto Impreso Ediciones, 2007), 80–85. Established in 1958 and from 1962 located in the heart of downtown Buenos Aires, the Fundación Di Tella boasted two other artistic centers, one dedicated to experimental theater and the other to music. The Di Tella Institute was notable both for the novelty of its financial structure within the Latin American context—it was funded by a corporate foundation linked to the SIAM Di Tella company—and for the part it played, in a complex break with formal academism and salon-style patronage and exhibition, in the promotion of young artists amenable to the international art market.

[2]   For an introduction to Masotta's role as a critic of the visual arts, see Ana Longoni, "Estudio preliminar: Vanguardia y revolución en los sesenta," in *Revolución en el arte: Pop-art, happenings y arte de los medios en la década del sesenta* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2004), 9–105.

was a criticism of pop art.[3] While pop, the artists argued, removed the images of mass culture from their so-called natural context in the mass media, happenings—and the supposedly elite social scene around them—were increasingly the product, rather than the source, of pop culture news.[4] The Media Art Group took the ideological operations of the mass media as its principal focus.[5] Calling for "a 'work of art' for which the moment of its realization disappears," the group called the autonomy of art into question.[6] Its preference for the mass media over the traditional plastic arts was less a binary choice than a purposeful decision: the intangible nature of communication signaled the universally mediated character of more traditional artistic techniques and conventions.[7] The materiality of the group's medium, in the artist Roberto Jacoby's words, was "more social than physical."[8]

Taken at face value, Masotta and the Media Art Group's individual and collaborative interventions staged a semiotic understanding of the social, produced differentially between signifiers and in relation to an empty and contingent place devoid of meaning. Undertaking the practice of "mythifying myth" in the group's first collective work, artists Roberto Jacoby and Raúl Escari professed their indebtedness to Roland Barthes's semi-

3   See Judith Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), ix, 12, 30, 32–33, and Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 1–9. The origin of the word *happening* has been attributed to the American artist and theorist Allan Kaprow in his essay "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" (1958) and to his early public work *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959). The term came to designate a kind of aleatory performance that involved varying degrees of audience participation, scoring, plot, and the dispersion of action. As Masotta noted, Kaprow himself had visited Argentina and declared it a country of *happenistas*. The Argentinean critic, however, was more directly concerned with devising an alternative, socially and theoretically informed model for avant-garde art over and against the sensorial immediacy of Jean-Jacques Lebel's interpretation of the happening.

4   See Néstor García Canclini, *Producción simbólica: Teoría y método en la sociología del arte* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1979), 118. Both the frivolity of the avant-garde and "the phenomenon 'Di Tella'" were, to a certain extent, constructions by the news media. García Canclini refers here specifically to the commercial magazine *Primera plana*, which, ideologically aligned with the dominant liberal, developmentalist ideology of the period, appealed to a trendy, youthful, urban audience.

5   Eduardo Costa, Raúl Escari, and Roberto Jacoby, "Un arte de los medios de comunicación," in *Happenings*, ed. Oscar Masotta et al. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Jorge Alvarez, 1967), 119–22. All translations from Spanish are mine unless otherwise noted.

6   Ibid., 122.

7   Roberto Jacoby, "Contra el happening," in *Happenings*, 127. In Jacoby's words, "A 'medium' (oil plus canvas) does not only transmit meaningful messages; it is rather the medium itself, in opposition to other media, which is meaningful."

8   Ibid., 126. For the original coinage of this phrase, see also Eliseo Verón, "La obra," *Ramona* nos. 9–10 (December 2000–March 2001), 46–50.

otic analysis of reified cultural images in *Mythologies* (1957). In Jacoby and Costa's *Happening para un jabalí difunto* (Happening for a Dead Boar, 1966), the artists advertised a performance in print media that would never take place. With this, they revealed the ways in which the mass media produce the reality about which they purport to inform the reader; in this case, the doubly naturalized happenings of the Di Tella scene. The group addressed both the quickly changing relationship between high art and mass culture and the way in which this new amalgam of "culture" had itself become the symptomatic site for the group's intervention.[9]

The group's influence can also be noted in the work that is most emblematic of the political radicalization of Argentina's neo-avant-garde. The collective ethnographic study and exhibition titled *Tucumán arde* (Tucumán Is Burning, 1968) posited itself as a counterinformational work, one of whose central targets was to reveal how the mass media occluded the repressive political atmosphere and heightened poverty of the northern Argentinian province of Tucumán during the dictatorship of Juan Carlos Onganía. The radicalized and self-proclaimed avant-garde that culminated in *Tucumán arde* can be characterized by its calls for the integration of art and life, its rebellious attitude toward the institution of art, and its reformulation of the artist's political commitment in terms of the artwork's own "political efficacy," a term that meant to make formal experimentalism part of the avant-garde's political task.[10]

In the growing body of critical literature on the period, the relationship between the initial praxis of the Media Art Group and its more confrontational successors points in two problematic directions. On the one hand, the Media Art Group and its successors have been cast as representatives of a uniquely Latin American, politicized reworking of Anglo-American conceptualism.[11] Other contemporary critics, by contrast,

9   See García Canclini, *Producción simbólica*, 110. The increasingly porous border between high art and mass culture in the capital city of the late 1960s was premised on the greater artistic production and autonomy afforded it, at least temporarily, by the penetration of foreign capital and the expansion of consumer markets, as new channels for the financing and distribution of literature and the visual arts were created. This particular concatenation of circumstances placed the Media Art Group's members in a novel relation to the contemporaneous spread of mass consumption, on the one hand, and the reconfiguration of artistic value, on the other.

10 For a detailed account of a number of emblematic rebellions against what Giunta refers to as Argentina's "modernizing circuit" of art institutions around 1968, see Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman, *Del Di Tella a Tucumán Arde: Vanguardia artística y política en el '68 argentino* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 2008), 66–73 and 90–163.

11 To this division we might also add what Jacqueline Barnitz refers to as "the two types of conceptual art" in Argentina: one more political, as in the later Di Tella avant-garde, and one

insinuate a more radical break between the avant-garde's calls to political action and the semiotic concerns of the Media Art Group, indebted as it was to Roland Barthes's critique of ideology in *Mythologies* and to Masotta's particular interest in the decentering of the subject implied by Lacan's return to Freud.[12]

Without rejecting the evidently political stakes of dematerialization in the Argentinean context, I would like to reconsider the theoretical parameters by which we define the supposed uniqueness of this politicization. As a novel kind of socially critical art, the Media Art Group laid the groundwork for rethinking the relationship between art and politics within a conceptualist framework that questioned the traditional media as well as the formal conventions of the art object. Turning to Masotta's writings on art in this light, I will attempt to trace the relationship between artistic media and ideology critique that is at stake in the praxis of media art. Masotta is perhaps best known in the Spanish-speaking world for his work as a translator and commentator of Jacques Lacan's early seminars and writings, and for founding the Escuela Freudiana de Buenos Aires (Freudian School of Buenos Aires) in 1974.[13] Masotta has also been noted for his eclectic interests and attempts at articulating French structuralism with Sartrean Marxism within the intellectual milieu of the Argentinean New Left during the 1950s and 1960s—in journals such as *Contorno* and *Clase obrera*, to which Masotta himself contributed. Much can and has deservedly been made of the circulation of French thought in this con-

more technological in scope, centered, from 1969, around the Buenos Aires Centro de Arte y Comunicación (CAYC) under the leadership of Jorge Glusberg. On this point, see Jacqueline Barnitz, "Conceptual Art and Latin America: A Natural Alliance," in *Encounters/Displacements: Luis Camnitzer, Alfredo Jaar, Cildo Mireiles*, ed. Mari Carmen Ramírez and Beverly Adams (Austin: Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery, College of Fine Arts, University of Texas at Austin, 1992), 35. See also Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960–80," in *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde in Latin America*, ed. Mari Carmen Ramírez and Héctor Olea (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 427; and Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007). Spanish art historian Marchán Fitz pinpoints the ideological concerns of the Argentinean avant-garde as early as 1972. See Marchán Fitz, *Del arte objetual al arte de concepto* (Madrid: Akal, 2010).

12   Ana Longoni, Mariano Mestman, Patricia Rizzo, and Andrea Giunta provide somewhat apocalyptic narratives of the avant-garde's politicization in the late 1960s. See Patricia Thompson Rizzo, Oscar Terán, and Lucas Fragasso, *Instituto Di Tella: Experiencias '68* (Buenos Aires: Fundación Proa, 1998). See also Andrea Giunta, *Avant-Garde, Internationalism, and Politics: Argentine Art in the Sixties* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 267–79.

13   On Masotta's introduction to and first incursions into Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, see Mariano Ben Plotkin, *Freud in the Pampas: The Emergence and Development of a Psychoanalytic Culture in Argentina* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 185–90.

text. My focus here, by contrast, will be on Masotta's writings about happenings and their potential implications for rethinking the forms of ideological critique possible today. Combining the incipient task of ideology critique in the Media Art Group's work and their manifesto with Masotta's interest in redefining avant-garde art, I will suggest that his unique understanding of the relationship between mass culture and high art, between the mass media and the artistic medium, points to a way of thinking about a materialist aesthetics that goes beyond the work's estranging effect upon the viewer.

The novelty of the Media Art Group's approach becomes clearer in light of Louis Althusser's practice of symptomatic reading. Symptomatic reading is meant to reveal what Althusser calls "the problematic" (*le problématique*), a term that can be defined as both the structure and the structuring principle that determines the forms through which a given problem or question can become visible.[14] In this sense, the symptomatic reading "divulges" the "fleeting presence" of this still invisible solution by relating it to a different text—in other words, by viewing it in the light of a different problematic.[15] By detecting and conceptualizing the absent presence of this problem, the symptomatic reading also makes visible the "presence in absence" of the causal logic of a given structure.

In Althusser's writings on art and theater, it is in a sense the works themselves that make us see and perceive the cause of a given structure in its necessarily phantasmal presence, distancing the spectator from his or her own lived ideology, while it remains the task of the critic to conceptualize this operation. Though the call to conceptualize the operations of a given text remains the same, art fulfills a qualitatively different function from philosophy with respect both to the critique of what Althusser understands as the humanist ideology of the individual subject and to the way in which we experience this gesture in relation to a given work.[16] Nowhere is this more obvious than in Althusser's practice of symptomatic reading in his essay on the Italian expressionist painter Leonardo Cremonini, who, in Althusser's words, "is not an abstract painter . . . but a 'painter of abstraction.'"[17] What Cremonini makes visible with his dis-

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14   Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (London: Verso, 2009), 26, 28.

15   Ibid., 29, 28.

16   Michael Sprinkler, *Imaginary Relations: Aesthetics and Ideology in the Theory of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso, 1987), 272.

17   Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 158.

torted and divided human figures is the real abstraction of social relations that otherwise remain invisible in our everyday perception of "reality."

Althusser borrows his understanding of art's ability to defamiliarize or distance the spectator from his or her everyday ideology from Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*. The aim of the V-effect is to "make of the spectator an active critic of society."[18] By shocking the spectator with regard to what he or she had taken as self-evident—by signaling the fact of theatrical representation through the use of exaggerated costumes, sparse sets, or an acting style devoid of pathos—the V-effect places a contemporary problem into historical perspective and vice versa so that the spectator can perceive his or her necessary path of political action with clarity.[19] The specificity of Althusser's rendering of Brecht's estrangement effect, however, lies in how works of art worthy of the name accomplish this effect through their own internal structures, in a sense directing the distance between the spectator and the work inward toward the internal workings of the artwork itself.[20] Similarly, while a work of art may transform its viewer through its semantic content—sociohistoric references, myths, and so forth—such a transformation occurs, for Althusser, as the decentering of the structure determining both the work and its spectator. However, the symptomatic reading can draw no necessary relationship between a structure's absent cause and the formal distortions in the work of art that render it visible.[21]

The Media Art Group and its avant-gardist successors proffered a challenge to the central place of defamiliarization in defining both art and its role in the transformation of the spectator. The group's critical novelty can thus be seen in the way it sought to redefine art by historicizing the logic inherent in the inseparability of causal "matter" and form.

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18 Bertolt Brecht, "A Model for Epic Theater," *The Sewanee Review* 57, no. 2 (1949): 432.

19 Ernst Bloch, "'*Enfremdung, Verfremdung*': Alienation, Estrangement," *The Drama Review: TDR* 15, no. 1 (1970): 124.

20 Warren Montag, *Louis Althusser* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 28; Louis Althusser, "The 'Piccolo Teatro': Bertolazzi and Brecht," in *For Marx* (London: Verso, 2005), 145, 146, 148, 151. If, for Brecht, the V-effect attempts to transform the spectator into an active critic of his own situation by presenting him with a distorted mirror of his familiar reality, according to Althusser's interpretation of it, the effect of defamiliarization must "make [the spectator] into this distance itself"; the play is the development of this new and incomplete consciousness at the structural level.

21 As Sprinkler has noted, Althusser's most developed discussion of the matter-form dichotomy and the labor of theory on the "raw material" of ideology can be found in the section titled "The Process of Theoretical Practice" in "On the Materialist Dialectic." See Althusser, *For Marx*, 182–93.

DEMATERIALIZATION

In his 1967 essay "Después del pop: Nosotros desmaterializamos" (After Pop: We Dematerialize), Masotta articulates the semiotic and sociological stakes of the already two-year-old practice of media art. Masotta's essay is framed as the search for a truer avant-garde against the popularity of both pop art and the happening.[22] Dematerialization, a term that Masotta borrows from the Russian constructivist artist El Lissitsky, remains the *only* choice left for an avant-garde truly cognizant, if not ahead, of its time. For Masotta, both pop art and happenings fail in their critical, historical task insofar as they pretend to represent and present, respectively, a social reality already reified by the mass media.

Over the course of his writings on visual art and the avant-garde, however, Masotta's position proves irreducible to a mere privileging of semiotics over subjective experience. As Masotta declares in the "warning" to his 1967 anthology of essays *Conciencia y estructura* (Consciousness and Structure), "art is neither in making oil paintings nor in museums" but rather "in the street, in life, on the covers of magazines, in fashion, and in the movies we thought were bad, in pocket novels and advertising images."[23] Contrary to what these lines might seem to suggest, Masotta's emphasis is not on the merging of art and everyday modern life.[24] Masotta insists, instead, on maintaining a separate realm for aesthetic production in such a way that works of mass culture serve as one of the models or conditions for art, thus redefined, rather than as one of its ends. Art should take its cue from the intimate relationship between popular works and their means of transmission, all the while redefining the way in which the artistic medium comes to be understood. In this sense, art's ability to become political cannot but acknowledge and incorporate the fact and logic of what Masotta sees as the complete formal subsumption of society under the mass media.

An artwork "of the mass media," Masotta writes, "is the most inclusive, the most totalizing, the only one capable of collecting the teachings of the past in order to produce genuinely new objects."[25] Mass media works only become "susceptible to receiving political . . . contents and really

22 Oscar Masotta, "Después del pop: Nosotros desmaterializamos," in *Conciencia y estructura* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1990), 235–64.

23 Masotta, *Conciencia y estructura*, 13.

24 Indeed, a very generous reading of Masotta's reproaches to the happening would conclude that what he criticizes is precisely the presumption that even an aesthetic experience woven of everyday objects and gestures might escape from the ideological and economic determinants governing the happening's form.

25 Masotta, *Conciencia y estructura*, 14.

fusing 'revolutionary praxis' with 'revolutionary aesthetics' through their own concept and structure.'"[26] Masotta proposes using the language and technical means of the mass media as art's own; however, more importantly, he also suggests that art's own artistic media and aims be allowed to be internally transformed by the need to make them relevant to both the fact and the logic of the media's totalizing effect.

In revisiting Masotta's antihappenings and media artworks, it would be reductive to think of dematerialization as a semiotic approach to culture that places either aesthetic experience or the work's physical support in a secondary role. Masotta's contribution, in this regard, amounts to more than underlining the social code that mediates between spectators and the supposedly immediate, sensorial experience of the happening, as might seem to be the case at first glance. In the same vein as Althusser's proposal for a materialist aesthetics, media art tries to analyze what it might mean for avant-garde art to take ideology as its own medium, to work on ideology as art's own physical matter or support, and to transform art through ideology's material instances, in this case television and popular print media.

We find the stakes of this proposal in the two works Masotta recounts in "Después del pop." In *El helicóptero* (The Helicopter), Masotta invites an audience of about eighty people to the Di Tella as part of a series of talks on the happening.[27] Without informing the audience members of their fate, Masotta divides them into two groups and puts them on buses headed for two different destinations, with one of them going to the Theatrón ballroom situated in a shopping gallery on the corners of Santa Fe and Puerredón in a popular shopping and business district, the other headed for the abandoned Anchorena train station in the city's northern, upper-middle-class neighborhood. The second group witnesses a helicopter arrive, while the first, trapped in the Theatrón, is purposefully made to arrive late to the helicopter landing. While inside the Theatrón, the public is seated and enveloped in a multisensorial environment of live music, flashing lights, and the projection of a film. The film itself was a replica or quotation of a film by the American pop artist Claes Oldenburg, in which a bandaged subject thrashes around trying to free himself. Juxtaposed with the film was a live actor who replicated the same gestures performed by the subject in the film against one of the walls of the hall.[28]

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26   Ibid.
27   Ibid., 247.
28   Ibid., 249–50.

The subject of Oldenburg's film captures well Masotta's intention for his own work. Despite being exposed to a plethora of sounds and images, these sensations convey no meaning of their own:

> It is certain that this is what the public "saw" and that the expressionist style of the situation was the result of what I myself had planned. But it is necessary to point out that that doesn't have much to do with it [*no tiene mucho que ver*], given that I did not believe in such expressionism. I simply want to say that the events at the Theatrón were not *all* of the *happening*: from the point of view of the totality, what happened in the Theatrón was nothing but a "differential" with respect to what happened at Anchorena.[29]

In an earlier passage, Masotta similarly stresses that none of the participants could "see" the totality of the events.[30] According his description of *El helicóptero*, Masotta's intention was to show how the apparently cohesive meaning of a narrative or myth can first be broken down into a series of synchronic, structural oppositions that nonetheless fail to account for the irreducible socioeconomic connotations embedded in the situation's overdetermined geographical sites. Masotta carefully staged the different categories of binary oppositions—geographic, economic, socioeconomic, historical-technical, and cultural—around which the group's story would have been constructed, modeling his structural synthesis of myth on Claude Lévi-Strauss's structural analysis of myth in his essay "The Story of Asdiwal."[31] Masotta goes on to point out, however, that while this schematic demonstration of the myth's composition reveals the "rational structure" within the apparent disorder of his antihappening, Anchorena's myriad sociohistoric connotations exceed the binaries of his own structural analysis.[32] Initially meant to function as the differential element that neutralizes and equates the semantic contents of each of the event's ele-

29   Ibid., 250.
30   Ibid., 247.
31   Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Story of Asdiwal," in *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism*, ed. Edmund Leach (London: Tavistock, 1967), 1–47; Masotta, "Después del pop," 253. Masotta lists these oppositions as follows: the Anchorena sky versus the Theatrón basement; the residential versus commercial neighborhoods of each; the supposed "neutralization" of class connotation in the gallery versus the implacable connotation of upper-middle-class status in the northern sector of Anchorena; the helicopter flying overhead at Anchorena versus allusion to the toilet or "water" in the Oldenburg film; and the expressionist scene of the Theatrón ballroom versus the romanticism of the bucolic landscape around the Anchorena station.
32   Masotta, "Después del pop," 246, 252.

Oscar Masotta. *El mensaje fantasma* (The Phantom Message), 1966. Poster advertising the television broadcast of the same words on Channel 11 pasted on a building at the corner of Córdoba and Maipú Avenues in Buenos Aires. Black and white photograph. Image from Oscar Masotta, *Revolución en el arte* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2004), n.p. Photograph by Rubén Santonín.

Oscar Masotta. *El mensaje fantasma* (The Phantom Message), 1966. Channel 11 television broadcast of the poster previously publicized. Black and white photograph. Artist's archive. Image from Oscar Masotta, *Revolución en el arte* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2004), n.p. Photograph by Pablo Suárez.

ments with respect to one another, the helicopter turns out to be the site where a historical contradiction both exceeds a structurally given lack and doubles back on the supposedly neutral terms of the analysis, recodifying them in terms of class conflict.[33]

El mensaje fantasma (The Phantom Message), the second artwork Masotta recounts in "Después del pop," sheds a more complex light on the operations and stakes of art's dematerialization. In this later work, Masotta publicized a television broadcast on the walls of a building in downtown Buenos Aires: "This poster will be projected by Channel 11 on July 20."[34] Having bought two commercial television spots through an advertising agency, Masotta then broadcast the message announcing the self-referential words on the poster. The spot read, "This medium announces the apparition of a poster whose text we project."[35]

While *El helicóptero*, as Masotta clarifies, was meant to bring out the semiotic aspects at play in the happening, *El mensaje fantasma* was supposed to capture the real critical and aesthetic novelty of media art in contrast both to traditional artistic objects and to commercial advertising, whose medium the work would appropriate as its own. Masotta distinguishes between the media artwork's material, media, and object: "Just as the 'material' of music is found in certain sonorous material . . . or, in the same way, bronze, or wood, or marble, or glass, or new synthetic materials constitute the 'material' with and on which it is possible to make sculptures, so 'works of communication,' too, define the area of their own 'materiality.'"[36] In addition to addressing the masses as its audience, and in lieu of the select and elite group of aficionados at the Di Tella, *El mensaje fantasma* radicalizes the overdetermined site at which the social code threatens to break down in *El helicóptero*. Similarly, *El mensaje fantasma* transforms the simultaneously historical and irrational connotation at the heart of the social code in *El helicóptero* into a senseless, tautological statement. At the same time, the specific "materiality" or immaterial nature of the media artwork as exemplified in *El mensaje fantasma* moves beyond the objective, physical traits of its technological transmission in order to mark itself as the simultaneously material and sublime condition of ideology at work in both pieces.

33   Ibid., 255–57.
34   Ibid., 259.
35   Ibid.
36   Ibid., 244.

As Masotta elaborates further through a comparison of media art with advertising, advertising's "material" can be considered the "consciousness of the subjects to which it is directed," while its medium can be considered the means employed to reach this end, and the "object" the final product—a commercial or billboard—that results from this.[37] By contrast, unlike both traditional sculpture and advertising, media art lacks the perceptible beauty that might characterize these other forms, regardless of their social register.[38] Masotta maintains a certain distance and wiliness in his references to the purported materiality of the mass media's ideological processes. Far from denying the physicality of the dematerialized artwork and from placing its use of language on an ideal plane, Masotta insists instead on the material quality of ideology, but only up to a point. For Masotta, media art is more material or tangible not because it deals with ideology in its material instances, nor because in its characteristic lack of beauty it retreats from symbolization as such. Referring to "what is perceived" in the media artwork, Masotta is purposefully elusive about what he means by "beauty," that is, whether it refers to the formal qualities of a given advertisement, or whether what he has in mind is something closer to the appearance of the media artwork more broadly speaking. This nondistinction is made all the more suggestive by Masotta's attempt to clarify what he means by media art's lack of "beauty" in direct reference to *El mensaje fantasma*: "What is perceived [in the mass media work] has more to do with certain effects of intelligibility that are obtained through the 'transformations' of the mass media's habitual structures."[39] Masotta appears to suggest here that no line can be drawn between the work's sensual qualities and the effect of shocking the viewer out of his or her spontaneous perception of reality, forcing him or her as it were to "see" ideology in the media art object itself.

At the same time, it is for this reason that *El mensaje fantasma* resists fully complying with either Barthes's or Althusser's frameworks for articulating art's stake in ideology critique. What we are made to see is the condition, if not the effect, of intelligibility. In "Contra el happening" (Against the Happening), Jacoby references Barthes's *Mythologies* in calling for media art to turn the naturalized use of meaning in the mass media against itself.[40] Working upon a pregiven language of signs or

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37   Ibid., 260n8.
38   Ibid.
39   Ibid.
40   Jacoby, "Contra el happening," 126.

forms, myth, for Barthes, functions through a selection and configuration of the meanings of individual signs. Myth, according to Barthes, makes the relationship between the composite form and the contingent meaning assigned to it appear naturally given and inseparable. The mythologist's task therefore is to separate signs and meanings, analyzing the logic by which they were assigned and showing in the process how there is no necessary relationship between form and meaning.[41]

What is striking about *El mensaje fantasma* is the fact that it structurally forecloses meaning with its own self-referential presence, signaling nothing other than its own act of signification. *El helicóptero* allows us to see how a series of binary oppositions (poor vs. wealthy, land vs. air, etc.) become woven together into a supposedly meaningful narrative with the differential of the helicopter at its center; *El mensaje fantasma*, by contrast, takes this difference as its focus, rendering positive the structural lack at the center of *El helicóptero*. Furthermore, like Althusser's reading of Cremonini, *El mensaje fantasma* privileges the empty, structural level of the artwork's operations. At the same time, it makes us "see" the absent cause as such, not as the presupposition of a phantasmal stain peeking through reality, but rather as the nonsensical presentation of what must, but in this case cannot, be presupposed in order to produce "intelligibility." What we "see" is the underpinning of ideological capture in the brute materiality of its contingence.

MEDIUM AND MATERIALITY

Masotta's suggestive, if somewhat obscure, reframing of the medium in the mass media artwork becomes all the more salient in the heightened rhetorical context of the late 1960s avant-garde. Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman have provided the most comprehensive account yet of the politically radicalized avant-garde of the late 1960s in Buenos Aires. According to them, the question of the artwork's efficacy becomes paramount in this context, standing in as a code word that might release experimental art from the double burden of, first, the formalist exclusion of contingent, material concerns and, second, leftist calls for art's political "commitment" at the cost of aesthetic innovation. Key here is the connection between what the artist Juan Pablo Renzi calls "violence as aesthetic language" and the simultaneously material, sensible, and negative, medi-

41   Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1972), 109, 124, 128.

ated nature of the medium glimpsed in the work of Masotta and the Media Art Group.[42]

León Ferrari, who, like Renzi, figured centrally in the radicalization of the young artistic avant-garde of the late 1960s, similarly tested the boundaries of the medium's materiality in his 1968 talk, "El arte de los significados" (The Art of Meaning). According to Ferrari, the accomplished work of art would be one which, "within the artist's own ambit, has the same impact as a terrorist attack in a country in the process of liberation."[43] While Longoni and Mestman acknowledge that the language of political violence is used to reaffirm the artists' revolutionary contribution through art, they nonetheless emphasize that the artists' "allusions to the armed struggle are not only metaphorical."[44] Longoni and Mestman are referring here both to some artists' direct political militancy and to what they perceive as the successful collapse of art into politics, a feat that according to Peter Bürger eluded the historic avant-gardes.

Against the grain of Longoni and Mestman's reading, Ferrari's own literal, rather than metaphorical, interpretation of meaning as art's new medium also lends itself to a more subtle approach to the meaning's materiality, suggesting that the immanence of a work's physical support may also function as the inscription of subjective cause:

> If we consider the work of art as an organization of aesthetic materials selected by its author and realized according to rules invented by or borrowed by that author, we can prove that what the avant-garde has done is to constantly broaden the list of primary materials usable in art and to constantly reinvent the laws that organize them. That is how rags, cans, "*lo cursi*," light, sound, time, the environment where a work is exhibited, the mass media, self-destruction, action, etc. were added to oil paint and bronze. But by amplifying the list, they forgot or rejected one of the most important aesthetic materials: meanings. . . . Forgetting that there is nothing that cannot be used to make art,

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42 Longoni and Mestman, *Del Di Tella*, 162. Renzi used the phrase during his talk at the Primer Encuentro Nacional de Artistas de Vanguardia (First National Meeting of Avant-Garde Art), a colloquium organized in August 1968 in Rosario by a number of young artists working in and around the Di Tella. The symposium followed the censorship and direct police intervention in two young artists' shows: Experiencias '68 (Experiences '68) at the Di Tella itself; and Ciclo de Arte Experimental Rosario/1968 (Cycle of Experimental Art of Rosario/1968), sponsored by the institute at another space.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

those who affirm that red, time, meaning, and politics are not compatible with art and are not aesthetic materials don't know what the avant-garde is.[45]

Ferrari plays off the double genitive of his talk's title, "the art of meanings," which refers both to an art literally made of meaning—an expression Ferrari uses interchangeably with "politics" and "ideology"—and to the craft or technique of making avant-garde art that would be capable of overcoming the market's acceptance of formally transgressive gestures. As in Masotta's earlier definition of the media artwork's raw material as its spectators' consciousness, Ferrari describes politics, like meaning, as a tangible, physical presence, the very material that avant-garde art is made of.

Ferrari also develops the possibility of a relationship between the material medium and meaning within the framework of art's ideology critique in a fleeting reference to Luis Felipe Noé's book-length essay *Antiestética* (1965).[46] Following the passage quoted above, we read, "Clear meanings, social commitments, ideologies, thus constituted what Noé would call the most durable and unmovable anti-aesthetics."[47] Noé was a young Argentinean plastic artist closely associated with neo-figurative painting who at the time lived and worked in New York. *Antiestética* calls for a revision of avant-garde art along Ferrari's lines. Noé's "antiestética" is not, as we might expect, a prescription for the dematerialization of art, nor for formal stylistic change. Like many others, Noé saw a crisis of formal, artistic, and social ideals and called on the artist not to create, but to "reveal images" of the unspoken and collective wishes of the moment:

> In this sense the process of revealing images is inexorable. When an artist loses his opportunity, another takes it. But there are images that can only be reached from a certain perspective. . . . Art is not an expressive work of individuals, but rather of the relations of individ-

45   León Ferrari, "El arte de los significados," in *Prosa política* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2005), 26. An excerpt of Ferrari's text has been translated as León Ferrari, "The Art of Meanings," in Ramírez and Olea, *Inverted Utopias*, 533–34. Ferrari alternates between the singular and plural uses of the word *meaning*. The plural, *meanings* (*significados*) translates most closely to the English *signifieds*. Though an awkward word choice, *signifieds* makes sense in light of Ferrari's discussion of how meaning should be understood in recent, experimental artworks. In such nonfigurative avant-garde works, the meaning of a given piece must be sought differentially in relation to the language of formal conventions that such a work seeks to reject or transform.

46   Ferrari, "El arte de los significados," 26.

47   Ibid.

uals called "artists" with their surroundings. The surroundings express themselves through the relations between them. And the surroundings are not objects in themselves, but everything that conditions the things in themselves, the structure of an epoch.[48]

Working on society's "spontaneous illusions," Noé defines artistic practice as bringing to light invisible but determinant forces in an already existing image.[49] Despite the apparent similarity between the passage above and the painting of determinate absence that governs our vision of reality in Althusser's essay on Cremonini, *Antiestética* as a whole points toward a different notion of how art fulfills the task of aesthetic estrangement, an idea both Noé and Althusser share with Masotta.

The example of the North American pop artist Claes Oldenburg in the second half of *Antiestética* speaks to a method of "symptomatic reading in reverse" that rejects the effect of ideological estrangement we find in Althusser's approach to Cremonini. Evoking the image of Oldenburg's flaccid, inflatable sculptures of quotidian American objects from the 1950s and 1960s, Noé argues that the specificity of Oldenburg's project consists in not changing anything in these objects at the formal level. According to Noé, Oldenburg neither alters the objects he reproduces— telephones, lipsticks, toilets, and so forth—nor denies the formal pleasure they might elicit. In a brilliant reading, Noé insists that Oldenburg does not simply present things as they appear, even if this is what he might seem to be doing. Oldenburg's point is thus not to imbue the quotidian object with a level of formal sophistication the ordinary viewer did not know it had, nor to annihilate art's aesthetic potential. Rather, Noé asserts, the pop artist seeks to transcend the reality he reproduces. The "magic" in these sculptures resides "in apparently not modifying anything."[50] For Noé, despite their hyperbolic size and altered texture, Oldenburg's objects are not meant to estrange or deceive the viewer. The artist's sumptuous mass cultural reproductions are a lure without a veil, and their unique effect derives from the insertion of some slight, but undetectable internal difference. The objects are chosen for their social value, the charged associations they evoke in the viewer: "The selection of these elements is fundamental: the hamburger, ice cream or things from *la vida confort*."[51]

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48   Luis Felipe Noé, *Antiestética* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Van Riel, 1965), 35.
49   Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 67–68.
50   Noé, *Antiestética*, 154.
51   Ibid., 155.

Lacking the double valences and distortions through which the work of art might reveal its ideological determinations, Oldenburg's objects nonetheless exemplify the way art should approach the conditions of its appearance. In this sense, pop art elides the representation of the popular classes themselves, since such portrayals, whether they are folkloric or social realist, traditionally correspond to the ideology and formal artistic criteria of the hegemonic class. "Here in pop art, on the other hand," Noé affirms, "what remains is the form of popular vision."[52] Rather than remaining there, we might add, pop art institutes this "popular vision" as an empty, formal gesture through the slight difference it inserts between the original object and its representation, a transformation that occurs by "apparently not modifying anything."[53]

The contradiction within Noé's reference to popular vision lies in the fact that it assumes a distinctively "popular" ideology precisely at the point where pop art homogenizes conflicting class ideologies. We might even suggest, with a higher degree of skepticism, that even though Oldenburg's objects seem to constitute themselves in and through this popular point of view, they are really aimed at an enlightened, bourgeois audience. What these objects seek for their late-twentieth-century American public is the estranging effect of *vanitas*: to wit, that its members still aspire to the culture they claim for themselves, that the process of modernization is not so far behind them, or that the ironic veneer of kitsch depends on the efficacy of a fiction about class arrival. Such a cynical reading, however, detracts from the perspicacity of Noé's more immediately paradoxical theory. In fact, Noé's more sweeping gesture is to propose an art whose political "efficacy," in Ferrari and Renzi's language, rejects the operation of ideological estrangement at a broad level. For Noé, the gaze or cause of a given symbolic structure remains inseparable from the popular imaginary it assumes, though this imagery always sustains some structurally possible relation to a third space of seeming, or, in psychoanalytic terms, to the symbolic as defined by lack.[54]

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52   Ibid., 157.

53   Ibid., 161.

54   Lacan defines the gaze as the illusory place within the fantasy scene at which the subject confuses his own failing or split nature with the vanishing point of the scene (83). As the place of the subject himself—"in the final resort our position in the dream is profoundly that of someone who does not see"—the gaze is the place from which the subject is determined as desiring and thus limited in his capacity for self-representation (75, 83). Though he defines the gaze as "the underside of consciousness," the place of desiring lack in which the subject is anchored in the symbolic Other, Lacan nonetheless asks how we might "try to imagine it" (83). See Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 2005).
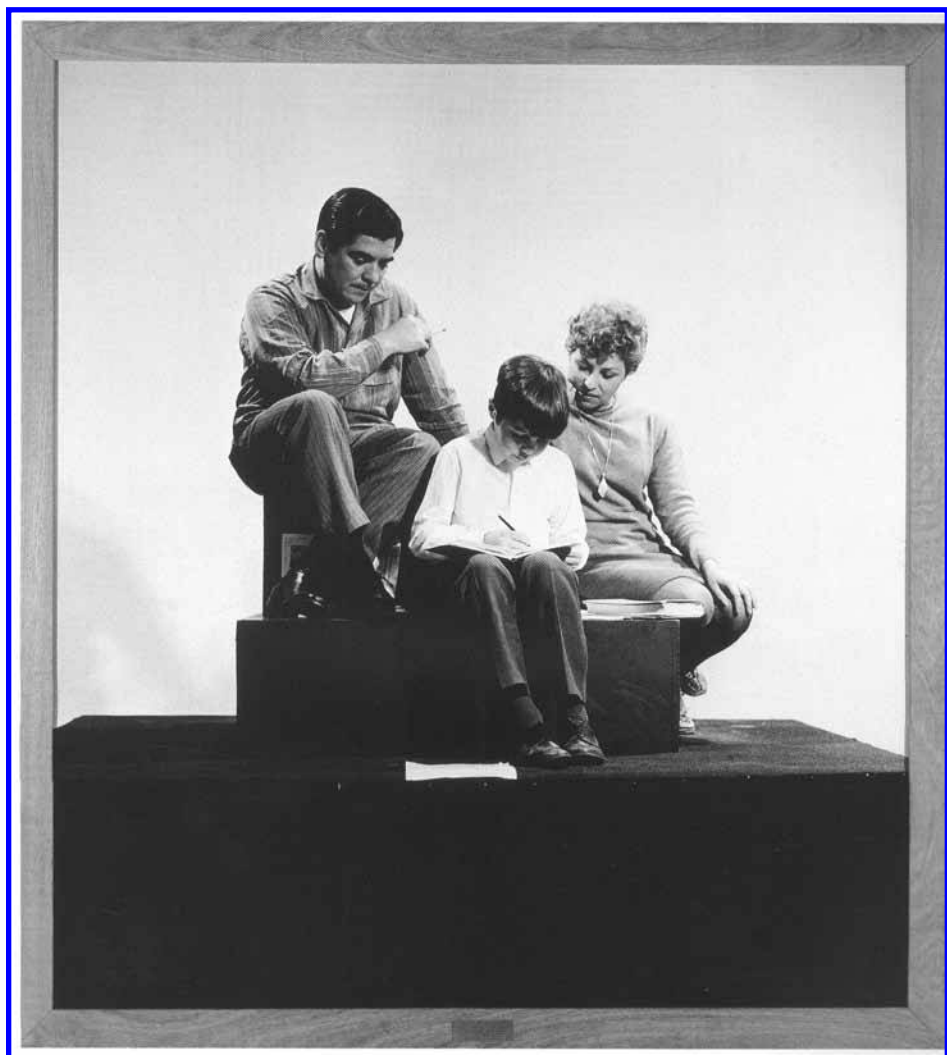
Oscar Bony. *La familia obrera* (The Working-Class Family), 1968/1999. Black and white photograph on paper, mounted on wooden frame with bronze plaque and inscriptions about the work, 200 × 180 cm, print 2/5. Eduardo F. Constantini Collection. Image from *Oscar Bony: El mago* (Buenos Aires: MALBA—Fundación Constantini, 2007), 77.

LA FAMILIA OBRERA

Oscar Bony's *La familia obrera* (The Working-Class Family), performed at the Di Tella's Experiencias '68 exhibit and later circulated as a series of photographs, captures well the coincidence of real cause and imaginary consistency that characterizes Noé's "antiestética" and Masotta's particular view of art's dematerialization. In the performance of *La familia obrera*, three actors sit atop a pedestal composed of two different covered platforms. Though photographic registers of the performance vary, in the most widely circulated print, the family's father takes his place on top, with his wife and son seated at his feet on the lower block.[55]

Placed beside the boy's feet, a sign identifies the names and the salary paid to the head of the family. The label declared that Luis Ricardo Rodríguez, machinist by profession, would earn twice what he earned at his job for remaining on exhibition with his wife and son for the duration of the show.[56] As in Bony's earlier installation *Local y su descripción* (Storefront and Its Description) (1967), *La familia obrera* also included a tape of household sounds in the background.[57]

With different objectives in mind, both Longoni and critic María José Herrera have identified a "resistance to interpretation" in *La familia obrera* because of its use of human actors, whether this was intended as a critique of art's institutional determinations—as in a ready-made—or on the contrary as the abolition of these determinations.[58] To this I must add that the piece also alludes to feelings about the kind of social mobility once promised by Peronism, a project whose political crisis was unfolding for the Argentinean left at the same time.[59] *La familia obrera* is simi-

55   María José Herrera, "Arte y realidad: *La familia obrera* como readymade," in *Arte y poder: 5as. Jornadas de Teoría e Historia de los Artes, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras (UBA) del 8 al 11 de septiembre de 1993*, ed. Graciela Schuster (Buenos Aires: Centro Argentino de Investigadores de Arte, 1993), 174.

56   Victoria Giraudo, "Cronología biográfica," in *Oscar Bony: El Mago*, ed. Marcelo E. Pachero, Andrea Giunta, and Fernando Garcia (Buenos Aires: MALBA—Fundación Constantini, 2007), 208.

57   Ibid. Ana Longoni, "Action Art," in *Arte [no es] vida: Actions by Artists of the Americas 1960–2000*, ed. Deborah Cullen and Maris Bustamante (New York: El Museo del Barrio, 2008), 85. Longoni, like María José Herrera, has pointed to the relationship between Bony's incorporation of human subjects and signage, on the one hand, and Alberto Greco's earlier series of performance pieces and photographs titled *Vivo-dito* (Living Finger), on the other. For a different view of the working-class family's labor as a ready-made commodity unlike any other, see John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art after the Readymade* (London: Verso, 2007).

58   See Herrera, "Arte y realidad" and Longoni, "Action Art."

59   According to Andrea Giunta, rather than diffusing bourgeois notions of high, modernist, or folkloric art to the people, Bony chose to bring a "module" of the people to Di Tella's bourgeois audience. For Giunta, Bony exhibits "the people" while at the same time he "exposes"

larly suggestive for the Christian imagery it calls to mind, shocking the viewer with the purported presence of workers labeled, as with a ready-made, as "art" while at the same time subverting any facile identification of the performers as either workers or as members of the class whose name they bear.[60] Part of the allure, but also the difficulty of analyzing *La familia obrera*, has to do with the work's title and its use of signs: while these labels introduce a certain possibility of deception, they also insist on the fact that the subjects on the platform really are what they claim to be.

A contemporary piece that Bony would likely have known, Masotta's *Para inducir al espíritu de la imagen* (To Induce the Spirit of the Image, 1966), focuses on precisely the kind of symbolic veiling that *La familia obrera* excludes.[61] Amid Masotta's highly detailed account of the plan and production of this performance, the look and provenance of the performers stand out as its most prominent aspects. Masotta recounts how it occurred to him to recruit his performers from among the *lumpenproletariat* of downtown Buenos Aires not far from the Di Tella: "shoeshine boys or beggars, imperfect people, a psychotic from the hospice, an impressive looking beggar woman" whose tattered designer clothes and bronzed complexion, Masotta adds, capture "the perfect image of a person with a certain economic status who had suffered a rapid and disastrous fall."[62]

Masotta recounts that originally he wanted to go out into the street to find performers, paying them in advance for their work at the Di Tella.[63] In the version that he would eventually execute, however, he notes that instead of "people of lumpen extraction, [I] would use actors . . . though this did not involve much of a compromise nor much posturing to the detriment of reality."[64] Instead of paying beggars in the street, he hired as extras a set of actors from a casting agency whom Masotta had noticed for their especially decadent look. He eventually decided on the sum of

them as wage earners, which also points to the principal contradiction within Peronism itself. See Andrea Giunta, "Una estética de la discontinuidad," in *Oscar Bony: El mago*, 27.

60 The Chilean critic Rodrigo Zúñiga reads *La familia obrera*'s disturbing corporal presence as indicative of labor's "bare life" under the current regime of political economy. See Rodrigo Zúñiga, "La demarcación de los cuerpos," in *Estética de la demarcación: Textos sobre arte y biopolítica* (Santiago, Chile: Metales Pesados, 2008), 83–109.

61 Oscar Masotta, "Yo comití un happening," in *Revolución en el arte*, ed. Ana Longoni (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2004), 298–99. Mounted at the Di Tella Institute, *Para inducir* was based on a performance piece by the North American composer and Fluxus artist La Monte Young that Masotta had seen at St. Francis College in downtown Brooklyn the previous year.

62 Ibid., 302–3.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid., 307.

six hundred pesos per day per actor, two hundred more than each would have earned at his or her normal "day job" as flea market or pawnshop salesmen in the city's popular neighborhoods. In exchange, the actors submitted to standing still against a gallery wall and being observed by an audience for an hour at a time.[65] Though Masotta asked his cast to "dress as poor people," some insisted on making themselves up as if to assume their personas as actors.[66] As spectators entered the room, Masotta distributed the actors' pay stubs, and then introduced the action by informing the audience of the actors' meager remuneration. The central point and palpable humor in Masotta's narrative about *Para inducir* springs from the fact that Masotta pays the very same decadent subjects as actors in order to assume their own identities.

   La familia obrera presents a perfect inversion of this scene at several levels: through its claim that the performers are not actors but really workers in the flesh, by displaying a decadent working class closer in appearance to Peronist imaginary than to its own "rapid and disastrous fall," and by using language against itself in order to forestall any possible deception between signifiers and signified. As in *Para inducir*, Bony's piece revolves around the use of a label that, by proclaiming the identity of the three workers, also suggests the possibility that they are not what they claim. At the same time, though, the label's statement—informing spectators that the three subjects are a working-class family being remunerated for their time—turns this possibility for deception to the work's advantage. The sign plays on the possible contradiction that the happy trio, laden as it is with the references to Christian iconography—the suggestion of the holy family, the triangular shape of the pieta, the presence of the book resting on the son's lap at the geometrical center of the composition with his parents looking alongside—and to the modern, nuclear family, might also and at the same time consist of workers. In other words, at the political and economic height of 1968, *La familia obrera* appears as somewhat uncanny precisely to the extent that it does not deceive us.

   It is here, I would argue, that *La familia obrera* returns to the Media Art Group's mission to denaturalize myth and to define art's dematerialization as this very operation. I want to elucidate this point with reference to Jacques Lacan's twenty-third seminar on the *sinthome* via his reading

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65   Ibid., 309.
66   Ibid., 311.

of James Joyce. In Lacan's late reformulation of the neurotic symptom, the psychotic subject creates his or her own substitute for symbolic inscription and its imaginary guarantee of sense by crafting a master signifier out of the real of his or her enjoyment or *jouissance*. The subject's cause of desire is, in this sense, not supposed in its real absence, but rather proposed in its presence as that which lends the subject a certain imaginary consistency. Two aspects of the *sinthome* are worth noting in this context: first the immanent relationship of form to content it implies and second the extent to which its particular way of inscribing cause at the level of appearance continues to suggest a possibility for critique and interpretation.

I cannot offer here an adequate treatment of Lacan's conceptualization of the symptom. Nonetheless, this very partial reference may help us theorize the tasks of materialist aesthetics as initiated by the Media Art Group, especially as regards the status of interpretation and knowledge concerning the subject's own object cause of desire. Lacan highlights the distinction between the interpretation, or analysis of the subject's symptom, on the one hand, and the singularity of the uninterpretable *sinthome*, on the other. In contrasting the functions of history to myth, Lacan argues that "one must pass through this determined filth in order perhaps to rediscover something which is of the order of the Real. . . . There is the ruse of history. History is the greatest phantasm of all, if one can say that. Behind the history of the facts that interest historians, there is myth."[67] Lacan is alluding in part to the way in which empirical knowledge of history is subordinate to the logic of fantasy and the paradoxical temporality of its analytical reconstruction, in terms both of the grand history studied by historians and of the analysand's relation to the object cause of his or her desire during the process of analysis.

In Masotta's recasting of the structural study of myth in *El helicóptero* as much as in Lacan's own reinterpretation of the neurotic's individual myth, structural lack conditions the potential permutation of mythic or imaginary elements and allows for a certain *savoir* to emerge through this very process. In the passage above, by contrast, myth is itself the proof that this possibility remains foreclosed.

The contrast Lacan draws between history and myth stems from a discussion of the linguistic copula, a word that links subject and predi-

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67   Jacques Lacan, "Seminar 23," *Le sinthome*, March 16, 1976, accessed April 4, 2012, http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/THE-SEMINAR-OF-JACQUES-LACAN-XXIII.pdf, modified translation. See also *El seminario de Jaques Lacan: El sinthome* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2006), 122.

cate. Lacan links this allusion, in turn, to the way in which, during the course of an analysis, the analysand is able to assume (himself or herself) as garbage, lack, and so on insofar as the analyst simulates for the analysand the latter's cause of desire. In doing so, Lacan suggests, the analyst illuminates the extent to which the copula of being operates metaphorically, substituting the masking effect of the signifier in place of the subject's lack. In its mythic consistency, the *sinthome*, by contrast, refuses both its own analysis and the symbolic ruses of the analytic relationship described above.

The *sinthome* can thus be said to function as a special sort of simulation in lieu of the fictional deception of transference: "Joyce did not know he was constructing a *sinthome*, I mean that he was simulating it. He wasn't conscious of it. And for that reason [it/he] is pure artifice, a man of know-how, which is also called an artist."[68] The *sinthome* makes no distinction between content and form: its solid, mythic elaboration in the imaginary simulates the guarantee of meaning as much as it presents the truth of the subject's own artificial and reified guises.

La familia obrera has a consistency born from the mutual dependence between its own visual qualities, on the one hand, and the semantic content attached to them, on the other. In the spirit of Lacan's comments on Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, *La familia obrera* has a mythic, dreamlike quality that in its self-declarative reality "slips, slips, slips" toward the expression of a "collective unconscious."[69] This, writes Lacan, happens in such a way that "nothing can be done to analyze it." As an inscription of the drive in its real and imaginary dimensions, the *sinthome* incarnates an obstacle to knowledge.[70] At the same time, the *sinthome*'s conceptualization and formalization in writing points to the necessity and possibility of interpretation, even where no retroactive operation of meaning can take place.

As a writing of the real, so to speak, *La familia obrera* makes sense in its differential relation to the symbolic veiling in Masotta's *Para inducir*. *La familia obrera* imbues the brute senselessness of *El mensaje fantasma* with a politically and historically charged semantic content. However, rather than suggest that appearances may not be as they seem, *La familia obrera* shows a very peculiar kind of thought where the revelation of any sort of subtractive determination or cause has been foreclosed. While *Para inducir* points to the historic truth of the Argentinean working class and

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68   Lacan, "Seminar 23," March 9, 1976, or Lacan, *El sinthome*, 116.
69   Lacan, "Seminar 23," March 16, 1976, or Lacan, *El sinthome*, 123.
70   Lacan, *El sinthome*, 163, 38.

the political-economic project that subtended it, *La familia obrera* presents the mythical content that might have sustained such a project of political subjectivization by pointing to the historicity of its revolutionary potential at the level of form.

The connection, then, between the Media Art Group and its more radicalized successors is to be found in the way that, rather than signaling the structural lack that makes signification or myth possible, Bony's piece exemplifies the mythical embodiment of truth's foreclosure. And yet, if *La familia obrera* and its relation to Masotta's materialist aesthetics provoke us to continue the critique, we might begin by emphasizing that a relation of foreclosure remains a relation nonetheless. In other words, ideology has not ceased to function in *La familia obrera*; on the contrary, ideology persists by transforming the nature of the relationship between representation and its determinants. Masotta and the Media Art Group allow us to glimpse this transformation by first positing ideology critique as the task of avant-garde art in the age of mass consumption, and then by pointing to ideology's simultaneously material and sublime support in the subject. As such, Masotta and the Media Art Group force us to "see" ideology as the inseparable inscription of subtractive cause and mythic content; they ask us to assume the task of materialist aesthetics in order to theorize that very effect.

IN THE WAKE OF "IN THE WAKE OF THE GLOBAL TURN"

ARUNA D'SOUZA

In November 2011, Jill Casid and I convened a conference at the Sterling & Francine Clark Art Institute, in Williamstown, Massachusetts, titled "In the Wake of the Global Turn: Propositions for an Exploded Art History without Borders."[1] In the call for papers, we asked what models we, as a community of scholars, might turn to "for not just a de-centered but also a reoriented practice of the global, one that reckons with radical difference, unevenness, and even the untranslatable." We were seeking, from an eccentric and agonistic position, to move away from unifying or "global" art history projects by acknowledging that "confronting the challenge of developing practices of and for 'the global' necessarily involves learning how to engage with a range of irresolvable frictions, disunities, and incommensurabilities." Underlying this declaration, of course, is the assumption that the disciplinary frame of art history works to smooth away such disturbances in the visual and discursive field, despite attempts (especially due to a period of postmodern critical positions in the 1980s and 1990s such as feminist and postcolonial studies, social art history,

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1   Jill Casid is associate professor of visual culture studies in the Department of Art History at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. At the time of the conference, I was the associate director of the Research and Academic Program at the Clark, a position that I have since left. Speakers at the conference included T. J. Demos, Talinn Grigor, Ranjana Khanna, Kobena Mercer, Nicholas Mirzoeff, Todd Porterfield, the Raqs Media Collective (Monica Narula, Jeebesh Bagchi, Shuddhabrata Sengupta), Kishwar Rivzi, David Roxburgh, Alessandra Russo, Renata Camargo Sà, Kerstin Schankweiler, and Isabel Seliger.

structuralist and deconstructionist models, and "the new art history") to abandon the telos of Hegelian historical explanation.

The conference was conceived both as a way of thinking through what challenges exist in the project of "doing the global" in art history and as a way of critiquing the projects and approaches that had emerged in scholarly writing and institutional initiatives over the previous decade that could be loosely grouped under the umbrella of "the global art history" or "world art history." These latter terms, that is, do not simply denote a general search for a transformation of art historical boundaries but, in fact, a more specific project that aims to synthesize aesthetic cultures from all geographical and temporal sites.

What follows here will not, in fact, be a review in the sense that is normally the case for this space, in part because the project is ongoing and tentacled: in addition to the ways in which the ideas generated around the conference will be taken up by its institutional host, the Clark, a long-standing force in the reimagining of the geographical boundaries of art history, and by the individual participants (speakers and audience), it will achieve a future potential in the volume that will succeed it, which will be coedited by Jill and me and appear in 2013. This, then, is not a review but a re-view, and a very personal one, of the consequences of this event for my thinking, as a scholar who engages the issue of the global from a particular position in the field: on the margins of the center, a scholar with commitments to feminist and postcolonial politics working in the heart of the Western canon.

For art historians and art history departments, there seems a particular urgency to "deal with" or "come to terms with" the reality that the world, in 2012, seems much bigger than the one our discipline has imagined for itself. For many, this has taken the form of an additive approach: tacking on extra units on non-Western art to one's survey courses, adding faculty positions in the study of non-Western visual traditions, and the like. While the latter, especially, has been an important step in the transformation of the field, it is hardly sufficient; teaching African or Chinese art using the standard art historical approaches simply reinforces the terms of its past exclusion. More interestingly, there has been a push to transform the basic tools of the discipline (the textbook, for example) by finding ways to tell a comprehensive history of art; this has led to a consequent search for the common language in which one might legitimately talk about the creation of tribal fetish objects and minimalist painting in a way that does justice to wildly divergent practices, some created in

cultures for which the Western notion of "art" does not exist. At the same time as we might now speak of "cultural production" or "built environment" as more expansive alternatives to "art" and "architecture," many of us have abandoned the textbook in favor of more flexible teaching tools (course packets, e-reserves, online image banks) and teach collaborative survey courses composed of specialists in a variety of regions and periods. We think of our fields, perhaps, in terms of issues of cross-cultural "contact," trade routes, and other models that allow for moving out from the center, for stretching the limits of what we formerly imagined art history to be. Many of us teach in departments where colleagues who may have been hired to address issues of "coverage" are proposing new narratives, based on diasporic models or models of transnational or transcultural contact, for our own objects of study—accounts of early-twentieth-century French modernism that start with Africa, or of European Renaissance painting theory that originate in the cultural empires of South America—and thus pushing us to rethink the canon itself.

Despite these changes, however, the center around which art history tends to operate has remained frustratingly resilient. I exist in an ambivalent position in relation to that center; my scholarship explores an archive firmly within the canon—French impressionism and postimpressionism, contemporary American and European art—yet it does so from a strategic marginality, addressing questions of gender and the erotic. Nevertheless, teaching this field at SUNY Binghamton, a university that has long embraced the global networks of cultural production, posed particular pedagogical opportunities and challenges for me, given that nearly two-thirds of the graduate students I taught were foreign students who intended to study topics far outside the geographic range of the discipline as often conceived. Like all of us working in academic institutions, museums, and research institutes now, I was addressing the question of globalizing art history from one of the loci of neoliberal globalization: our universities' calls for more internationally focused courses, more collaborations with foreign institutions, more satellite campuses in new financial and cultural capitals (Abu Dhabi, China, now India) are propelled by some of the same desires that lead to outsourcing, offshoring, searches for new markets, and fantasies of a frictionless movement of capital (in this case cultural capital) across a flat world. Given that one of the consequences of the new economy is the erosion of the commons—public funding of education foremost among them—this push toward the global is an act of survival for public universities especially: the *New York Times*,

in a recent article, pointed out the fact that many institutions are making vigorous efforts to recruit foreign students (who pay considerably higher fees) in order to increase tuition revenues; part of this effort includes diversifying programs and course offerings, as well as encouraging shifts in intellectual discourse and research among faculty.[2] Like universities' emphasis on interdisciplinarity in the 1990s (which, again, was motivated as much by a desire to cut operating costs by consolidating departments and creating new programs without additional funding), the emphasis on "the global" is tied to the fact of economic globalization, whether or not we think of it in those terms.

As scholars interested in "the global," then, we are obligated to face our own situation within this network of the exchange of cultural capital, and the ways in which neoliberalism is experienced by many in the world as a form of neocolonialism. This obligation was set into stark relief by a coincidence of timing: the conference took place just days after Mayor Bloomberg's eviction of hundreds of peaceful Occupy Wall Street protesters from Zucotti Park in New York City, and the protesters in Tahir Square in Egypt who had heroically faced off with their despotic government since the previous spring had just declared support for the Occupiers' efforts. This global wave of protests and resistances, in other words, and the very tangible effects of it (both liberatory and repressive) provided a backdrop for our conversations, and questions of how art history could find practices that addressed the current political reality—whether by adopting the "explosivity" suggested by the title of the conference or the language of occupation—was a major theme over the course of the two days.

The audience for the event, and in fact the authors of a large number of the almost 150 paper proposals we received when the call for papers went out ten months prior, was primarily scholars of art of the West, though many of them had interest in the methodological questions provoked by the fact of globalization. But the major question many of these participants had was a very practical one: how do I conceive my scholarship and teaching in this new moment of the academy, the discipline, and in fact the world? As one of the presenters, David Roxburgh, an expert on Islamic art, put it, more or less, "People who study Islamic art don't have to worry over the global because we are doing it, although with dif-

2   "Taking More Seats on Campus, Foreigners Also Pay the Freight," *New York Times*, February 4, 2012, accessed March 15, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/05/education/international-students-pay-top-dollar-at-us-colleges.html.

ferent degrees of success; the problem exists for all of you more than it does for us." Though one might point out that the "different degrees of success" are crucial, it is also true that in terms of professional formation, scholars of non-Western art are far more likely to be able to accommodate noncanonical visual cultural practices into their pedagogy than in the reverse case.

If my own process of adapting has been fairly ad hoc, it was compelled and facilitated by my grounding in feminism; feminist art history had launched its critique of canonicity, standards of "quality," artistic autonomy, questions of priority and belatedness, and other mechanisms of exclusion that structured the discourse of traditional modes of art history since its inception. To take up art history using the tools of feminism, in fact, requires attention to issues of the field's inequalities vis-à-vis marginality as such, not simply a marginality propelled by gendered difference.[3] More than that, to contribute to the discipline at this point without contending with the challenges posed by feminism, no matter how one defines one's intellectual project, seems wrongheaded at best.

The problem of trying to separate the two (feminism and "the global") was brought into stark relief, for me, in a conversation about the planned conference with a senior scholar who is working on a book of "world art history" and who found the premise of the conference problematic: "What would you say," he asked me, "if I told you that I could give you a history of art that included every cultural tradition and every time period, but left out, say, Camille Claudel? Or Meret Oppenheim?" When I said that I would consider that a failure, he balked, "How do you expect me to fit in everything?" "I don't," I responded. But as long as one is making choices, one must start from the position that those choices are motivated by ideology, and that canon formation starts from the very moment that you privilege one practice, maker, or tradition over the other. It makes no more sense to include medieval tapestries at the expense of Incan feather painting than it does to include Michelangelo at the expense of Gentileschi *unless you are willing to keep the most basic assumptions of traditional art history intact*, the very assumptions that foreclosed the possibility of a truly inclusive art history in the first place. This scholar's plan for a world art history was being conceived with the idea that if you expand art history too much it will shatter (in this case, because of the limiting frame of the textbook). His problem brings into stark relief the problem

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3   Griselda Pollock has been a particularly important voice on this issue; see, for example, *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

of dislodging the canon if one relies on art history's go-to tools: "the global" seems to be able to handle only one type of otherness at a time if one's goal is to leave the disciplinary structures intact.

While this particular conversation might suggest that such decisions are merely personal, made by a single scholar facing a mountain of material and having to make hard choices, the situation is much more complicated: these decisions are in fact based on a number of factors, such as historical accounts of subfields whose own biases go unexamined or unchallenged by the nonspecialist; on the availability of archives and photographs; or on the basis of textual (rather than oral or, ironically, visual) histories and documentation, all of which are particularly important within art history (as opposed to, say, visual anthropology or archaeology, which are fields that cultivate different types of competence and alternate forms of "evidence"). But the contingencies of these decisions do not mitigate the fact that it is here that canon formation begins.

A theoretical touchstone for me has been Jacques Rancière's text *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, a pedagogical theory that addresses the problem of integrating a North African immigrant community into the French educational system.[4] Based on Rancière's reading of a Revolutionary model of teaching in which the instructor risks giving up a position of mastery over an archive or a text and instead relies on the assumption that students have the capacity—as long as they have the capacity to read (or even merely to distinguish two marks from one another)—of learning without being taught, the text proposes that the professor can guide learning on any subject by asking the right questions of the students. The model, Rancière proposes, would subvert the ways in which existing pedagogical approaches, even progressive ones, inevitably cast these immigrant communities to the margins of society, culture, and the economic and political realms.

Rancière is hardly a feminist, and the text is hardly unproblematic, not least because it does not, in fact, model the sort of pedagogical position it advocates; it is, in other words, a pretty standard form of academic exegesis in which the author explicates an argument from a position of authority, demonstrating his grasp of concepts, histories, and rhetoric. However, what Rancière's argument and feminist critiques of art history share is the refusal of the idea of mastery as an intellectual position: if the discipline has been slow to adapt itself to the conditions of the so-

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4   Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

called real world, with its new ways of thinking outside of nation-states, of thinking in terms of flows and networks and affiliations, of thinking via new technologies that allow for new conceptions of temporalities and distance/space, then part of the reason for this has been the fact that scholars have been reluctant to reimagine what role they can play as educators. In order not to reproduce the canon I have inherited, I must not seek to replicate my work in my students; I must, as a matter of ethics and politics, take on a position of ignorance and make space for new questions to be asked.

Since the conversations at the conference, and in a workshop that immediately preceded it (convened by Steven Nelson),[5] I have been struck by the legacy—a limiting one—of a certain brand of critical art history that was important in the 1980s and early 1990s. This discourse, which found its theoretical touchstones in the work of Jacques Derrida and others, approached art history, among other problems, from the point of view of the power relations produced and reproduced in language, discourse, and disciplinarity. Art history was a master discourse, so this commentary went, and as such one needed to be attendant to the ways in which, in its very ontology, it constructed its subjects in a field of positions that were binary (the I and the other) and, in many ways, inescapable because they formed the very possibility of language itself. This critique of the discipline launched, for example, the establishment of the field of visual studies, which attempted to subvert some of the most limiting of those binaries: West versus non-West, art versus craft, high culture versus popular culture, form versus content, aesthetic autonomy versus an engagement with the social and political, and so on. As a master discourse, art history always posed the second term in these pairings as debased, compromised, powerless—as the Other confronting the enunciative subject position. Though the goal of the establishment of visual studies was not necessarily, in its earliest iterations, to open up the discipline to its geographical or cultural "Other(s)," it certainly interrogated the terms that determined that Other's exclusion, and some of its important early voices (including that of Kobena Mercer)[6] ended up doing that very thing.

5   Steven Nelson is associate professor of African and African American art history at UCLA. An edited transcript of this workshop, "International Initiatives and Regional Collaborations," will appear in the conference volume.

6   See, among Mercer's many publications, his Annotating Art's Histories series, published by MIT and INIVA, whose titles are *Cosmopolitan Modernisms* (2005), *Discrepant Abstraction* (2006), *Pop Art and Vernacular Cultures* (2007), and *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers* (2008).

To the extent that this theoretical tradition in art history—the Derridean turn, to paint with a broad brush—has had an impact on the development of the discourse around "the global," even if often in a watered-down form, it happened in two ways: first, by promoting a sensitivity—even oversensitivity—to the "problem" that to speak from the position of the West (or the Global North) is to speak from the place of power; second, through the conviction that art history itself is so rooted in the foundations of Western culture that it is almost incapable of dealing with those devalued terms in a way that does not merely perpetuate their devaluation.

It is my sense that both of these positions are incorrect, or at least problematic. In the first case—the question of the "problem" of speaking from the West—one might respond that the assumption that "speaking from the West" means, necessarily, speaking from a place of power is hard to sustain in the wake of the economic, political, and demographic changes that have happened in the world over the past thirty years. In 2012, the West hardly seems the (sole) locus of power, perhaps especially in the art world. At the workshop preceding our conference, a participant referred to the "hegemonic centers of art history." When I asked the assembled group of scholars, curators, and artists where they considered those "hegemonic" centers to be, the answers were, ironically, almost anywhere except Western Europe or the United States: Slovenia, Hongzhu, Australia, Istanbul, Mexico City, Brazil, Los Angeles, occasionally London. In the second case—the worry over the inevitable biases that seem to be encoded in the very discursive frame of art history—some participants in the workshop spoke derisively of a sort of "nihilism of critique" that characterizes a certain type of art historical engagement with the global, marked by hand-wringing over the inescapable specter of Hegel looming over art historical writing, in which the possibility of actually effecting a transformation of the discipline is foreclosed. Criticality, that is to say, was not understood by a number of the participants of the workshop as a sufficient end in itself, and in fact was seen as a way in which the possibilities of the global were always-already made impossible; what we need now, they contended, was a way to get to work.

In other words, what seemed a radical position in art history in the 1980s has ossified into a troublingly conservative position in the 2010s: the attendance to speaking from a position of (Euro-American, hegemonic) power seems now, in this moment in history, like a backhanded attempt to insist on the continuing power of the West in the face of its

increasing marginality in economic and cultural terms. In some senses, at least, it seems to operate as a wholly defensive measure, a loud declaration (with built-in "plausible deniability") that the Western academy does, in fact, still hold this power, still acts as colonizer, still positions the rest of the world as Other, even as the West's power is being propped up only through desperate and even hysterical military engagement (threatened or tragically real) throughout the world. It does not recognize that the institutions that have heretofore been seen as the foundations of art historical discourse (the encyclopedic museum, the textbook, the print journal) are not the gold standards that they were thirty years ago. In some cases, it functions, ironically and quite explicitly, as an argument for shoring up disciplinary boundaries that are under threat of collapsing under the unregulated importation of ideas from other visual traditions, disciplines, and geographies. Nor does it admit, most of the time, that while Euro-American scholars and research institutions may be cognizant of only the art historical conversations going on in Los Angeles, Washington, Williamstown, London, Paris, and Karlsruhe—or conversations that we academics organize in Other places with Other voices—there is a whole world of art historical and curatorial and art critical thinking happening that does not include us and does not depend on us, and that is exploding the notion of art history already. The Euro-American academy does not know, that is, or perhaps cannot admit, that we are playing catch up.

I should be clear here that these Other conversations and Other voices need not be geographically located in the non-West so much as located in the *discussion* of the marginal, the barely visible, and the unacknowledged sites of visual production. And if these conversations are happening, it is precisely because those speaking are willing to speak an imperfect language, an art history that is not quite adequate to their objects of study. In the way of the characters in Amitav Ghosh's extraordinary novel *Sea of Poppies*, these conversations are happening at (art historical) ports around the world, scholars standing in for the book's sailors and traders and colonialists and "natives" who all coalesce around Calcutta and understand each other maybe two-thirds of the time, and get in fistfights and fall in love and make their money and get cheated, all the while misunderstanding each other in ways that create new stories, in which the easy speakers of English (the lingua franca) have no advantage over those to whom the language is a foreign and imperfect tongue because it has become so hybrid that it does not function the way it did "at home."

What this requires, this approach that thrives on the misunderstandings, the incommensurabilities, the misprisions of our conversations across geographies and times, is an acknowledgment that, as Euro-American scholars (and, for people like me, scholars of Euro-American art), we do not fully understand the language that we think we speak with native ease. This is what is perhaps so curious about the way in which the global has been conceived as a problem in art historical discourse: it is seen above all as a matter of definition, method, theory, with the case often being made that a truly global art history can never happen because we have not found a method that would allow power to be thought differently in our discipline. But method has never emerged fully formed in advance of practice: Panofsky did not create his theories of iconology before he started working with his archives and objects, but in concert with that work, and he too was working with a set of art historical models and languages that were imperfect fits. Yet much of the writing on the global art history prioritizes method as a meta-conversation without actually engaging with the art historical writing actually being produced, even if produced in this imperfect space of theoretical hybridity, this space of pidgin methodology. As art historians committed to a true reimagining of the field in which we work, we must be willing to attend to the ways in which art history is spoken differently: that is to say, we must be aware, in ways that even the most committed proponents of "the global art history" are often not, that while one can and should be concerned with the stakes and nuances of the exportation of our discipline to other sites of art history, we have to be equally concerned with importations: we have to attend, that is, to studying Western art in light of methods emerging from the study of the non-Western, or from those areas that have been marginalized by the discipline up to now.

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A REVOLUTION IN CONSCIOUSNESS
DOLFI TROST'S *VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE*

CATHERINE HANSEN

Dolfi Trost (1916–66) was a member of a Romanian surrealist cell group founded in 1940 as the German occupation of France began, and disbanded with the communist takeover of Romania in 1947. Although this group was not able to publish its work, hold exhibitions, or even meet in public until 1945, a great deal of its most intense activity took place in wartime Bucharest, in secret and behind drawn blinds. Like the Main à Plume group in Paris, the Romanian surrealist group of the forties was a wartime surrealism—isolated, passionate, and under siege. The group's core was composed of Trost, Gellu Naum, Virgil Teodorescu, Gherasim Luca, and Paul Păun, but its members frequently worked with fellow travelers, including the artist Jules Perahim and the artist and resident femme fatale Nadine Krainik, who acted as a liaison between the Bucharest and Paris surrealist groups and continued to be involved in surrealist doings until well into the sixties. Naum and Luca in particular were close to the artists Victor Brauner and Jacques Hérold, both involved with the Parisian surrealists from the early thirties. They were all part of what could be called a Romanian archipelago within the surrealist movement led by André Breton.

Of the group's core members, three were Jewish: Trost, Păun, and Luca. All three managed, in the fifties (Trost and Luca) or sixties (Păun), to escape communist Romania to Israel. In Tel Aviv, Trost and Luca continued with their surrealist experiments, texts, and tracts, but the two

began to disagree more and more in their views, and when they finally came—literally—to blows, their friendship never recovered. At some point after this falling out, Trost wrote a seventy-page handwritten letter to Breton, titled "L'âge de la rêverie." This letter, slightly revised, later formed one part of Trost's 1953 book *Visible and Invisible*, published with Eric Losfeld's Éditions Arcanes.

This book, along with two other of Trost's books, is cited in "Balance-Sheet Program for Desiring Machines," an appendix to Deleuze and Guattari's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. "One already finds," they write, "in Gherasim Luca and Trost, authors whose work goes strangely unrecognized, an anti-oedipal conception of dreams which strikes us as being very fine."[1] In pointing out that the "manifest" content of dreams is far more important than their "latent" content, Trost

> reproaches Freud . . . with having failed to recognize the dream as a machine for communication with the outside world, with having fused dreams to memories rather than to deliriums, with having constructed a theory of the compromise that robs dreams as well as symptoms of their inherent revolutionary significance.[2]

Trost operates a reversal in which what the dream must neutralize—by treating it symbolically—is not a troubling or taboo content arising from the unconscious, but rather regressive and repressive elements issuing from our memories of the waking world. Trost's and Luca's anti-oedipal texts

> [bring] out an unconscious alive with revolution, straining toward a being, a non-oedipal man and woman, the "freely mechanical being," "the projection of a human group still to be discovered," whose mystery resides in its function and not in its interpretation.[3]

The second part of *Visible and Invisible*, in fact, begins with a dream of a special kind. Trost's account of this dream alternates with theses on the nature, functioning, and significance of dreaming, but it quickly becomes apparent that dreaming itself is not the point. The dream he relates is

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1   Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "Balance-Sheet Program for Desiring Machines," trans. Robert Hurley, in Félix Guattari, *Chaosophy*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1995), 132.

2   Ibid., 132.

3   Ibid., 133.

important because of what it reveals and what it makes possible: an experience of oneself against the backdrop of the universe—the universe of galaxies and gas clouds, of black holes and of distant stars hundreds of times bigger than the sun. It puts the human being and the universe, in a sense, face-to-face. For Trost, there are two ways of being in the world, the historical and the cosmological. The function of history, as a web of human events and relations, is to draw a comforting veil over the night sky and make us forget where—and what—we really are. The dream, at least in its "cosmic" mode, reminds us.

Trost also has much to say about what Deleuze and Guattari call "deliriums," and particularly about schizophrenia, which is not to be understood in its psychiatric sense. Both dreams and madness, he writes, have the capacity to place us immediately before the "world of stars and planets." For Trost, the dreamer and the schizophrenic are caught up in a dialectical process in which they turn back toward and work directly upon and within the world of daylight and reality that they had hitherto abandoned. In this way they arrive at something entirely new: a luminous and revolutionary way of living, what Trost calls life-within-life. Trost's understanding of schizophrenia is in many ways similar to that of Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*: "Schizophrenia is like love: there is no specifically schizophrenic phenomenon or entity; schizophrenia is the universe of productive or reproductive desiring machines."[4] For the anti-oedipal schizophrenic, there is no self and nonself, no inside and outside. He is connected to everything, and everything can be "take[n] into himself, as in a dream."[5]

This schizophrenic, multiply-connected, and nondualistic way of being is, for Trost, allied with a certain mode of thought: a thought that "turns upon itself," taking itself for its own object. It is consciousness that is constantly aware of itself as consciousness. This self-regarding consciousness is in turn distinct from, but linked to, the "cosmic" consciousness made possible by the dream. Trost feels, as well, that those who have attained this form of consciousness are fundamentally, "ontologically" different from those who have not. This is the context in which his readers should understand his ideas about a new "race" of human beings: anyone might discover in himself or herself the capacity to become this

4   Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 5.

5   Here they quote Georg Büchner's short story "Lenz." Ibid., 2.

new kind of being; and indeed, Trost writes, the role of any revolutionary collective should be to hasten and disseminate the necessary moment of awakening. The revolution—by which he means, simultaneously, the surrealist revolution, the liberation of the proletariat, and the freeing of human expression in all its forms from oppression of all kinds—must incorporate self-regarding consciousness and "cosmic" consciousness within its unfolding, instead of setting them aside as a kind of mystical idealism.

I have chosen to translate the title of the first section of *Visible and Invisible*, "La méthode des ombres," as "Shadow Tactics" mainly because Trost here incorporates dream, madness, and poetry (this last understood in the surrealist sense as a way of being, thinking, and creating rather than as the simple creation of poems) into a discussion of revolutionary strategy and collectivity. However, given his fascination with both astronomy and astrology, Trost might easily have been thinking of the "shadow method" that Galileo used to determine the height of lunar mountains: knowing the length of a cast shadow and the angle of the sun, the height of anything can be calculated, even on the moon. This, as Trost might have thought, is a way of using the intangible (sunlight, shadow) to measure and understand the tangible. What he calls the "invisible," then, should not be pursued for its own sake, as in occult and spiritualist traditions, but should instead act as a kind of fulcrum for thought. The "invisible" is not a world of spirits and occult forces, but instead that which permits the discovery of a perceptible but as yet inaccessible "concrete unknown"—like the lunar mountains that Galileo could not travel to touch.

Visible and Invisible is often difficult for a contemporary reader to approach. This is partly because its audience, whether Trost liked it or not, was a group of readers to whom a promiscuous mix of Freud, Marx, alchemy, and specifically surrealist concepts (including automatic writing and objective chance) would not be unfamiliar. It is also because Trost took a passionate amateur's approach to the theories, philosophies, and sciences that he addressed and conjoined, which often makes his essays read like works of conceptual art. A reference to René Guénon might be followed by a paragraph on nonfigurative art and then by a poetic reimagining of the Hebrew alphabet.[6] Since the book cannot appear here in its

6   "*Mem*, the unconscious that chooses a conscious to its taste . . . *samech*, the serpent of sleep surrendering to fate . . . *tsadé*, disillusionment vanquished by the knife of poetry . . . *tau*, the power to destroy the nightmare." Dolfi Trost, *Visible et invisible* (Paris: Éditions Arcanes, 1953), 85.

entirety, I instead attempt to follow one particular thread of argument across two of its "chapters." Within what has been translated, I have had to omit some passages whose meaning relies on concepts explained in detail in other parts of the book. I have also omitted one footnote that is part of a series of footnotes that bear no strict connection to the main text and tell a separate story: that of a woman named X, a kind of natural medium and delirious freethinker who speaks in riddles and aphorisms. Since the other footnotes in this series do not appear in the translated section, I did not want to preserve this one out of its context. Finally, since the chapters in a sense stand alone, working out similar ideas in parallel and in widely varying modes, I felt that to switch the order of the book's first and second chapters would aid the comprehension of the whole.

FROM *VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE* [1] (1953)

DOLFI TROST

FROM PART TWO: "THE SENSE OF AN IMAGE"

I had a dream: a suite of scenes and familiar theater where, as always, fragments of known and unknown beings moved. A dream like all the others, one whose routine symbolizations of desire it is useless to detail, for the symbolic content of any interpretation that might be useful to the wide-awake is of little importance here. [2]

Toward the end, a few seconds before I woke, this dream took a tragic turn.

It is upon this final set of images, as common an occurrence for other dreamers as for myself, that I must turn our attention. At a certain point the dream lost its lively, anecdotic, and condensed character, and launched suddenly into a last, terrible scene, where it came to a halt.

It is after veering in this direction (for reasons unknown and not at all justified by the preceding dramatization) that it becomes disquieting to the highest degree and that, once it takes hold, it intimates the possibility that the dreamer might never emerge from that bottomless darkness from which the dream first arose. [3]

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1   Dolfi Trost, *Visible et invisible* (Paris: Éditions Arcanes, 1953).

2   The dream is a "motor derangement": the oneiric scene is continually in agitation, and any dream without hyperkinesia becomes a nightmare and interrupts itself. The transformation of movement into "oneiric catatonia," usually heralded by a period of anguish, is thus experienced as a progressive petrification of the interior scene.

3   Thought becomes cinematographic, the sentiment of nature rises anew, the geometry of autumn lets loose a clamor.

When we dream in this way, this final scene, which in its intrinsic violence forces us back awake, also places us before an age-old problem. It is a problem directly addressed to us, one from which the only escape is to wake. And as we know, this waking is experienced as a consolation, but only because of the qualitative change in our situation and not at all because we have answered to the terrible interrogation posed during the night.

This final scene—the nightmare—cannot be reduced to the phenomenon of déjà vu, to the mechanism of unconscious compensation, or to any other rational explanation that is perhaps true in a sense but devoid of any interest for the *intrinsic* significance of the dream.[4]

Reaching the place where the dramatization had led me, by way of the adventures that weave the plot of all dreams, I inwardly saw myself in a street, at the point of heading home.

For those inclined to detect, in oneiric images, memories from diurnal life, I will add that the street, and the house that appeared there, quite resembled those in the world of wakeful perception. All the preceding adventures, likewise, had been a medley of persons and objects familiar to memory.

In front of the door, I stopped to ask myself whether, considering the late hour (I realized this in the dream), another destination was still possible. I posed this question to myself just as precisely as in wakeful thought: still reflecting, I lifted my head, the sky was serene, the stars sparkled.

If certain parts of the dream are easily recognized as having earlier belonged to various aspects of reality, we can infer that its other parts, which we cannot find in our memory, are still things we once perceived in times past.[5]

It would be hard to admit that one set of visual elements in our dreams can have a source completely different from the rest, and in any case we experience everything, at the moment of its unfolding, as a unified ensemble. There would be no reason to believe that what is strange and unknown in our dreams is pure invention; we may more probably suppose a progressive "decantation," whereby the more recent data of memory cede their place to images that are equally real, but which have reached us from a far greater distance.

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4   Here, a schizophrenic dialogue: —There is something, but say then what there is?—I don't know, but there is something.

5   Autoscopy (interior seeing), just like certain telepathies and monitions, leads victoriously to true vision, liberated from optical impositions.

Perhaps, as it proceeds, the dream liberates itself from immediate memory and comes close to revelation—and this is what is so disquieting in its development.

Still debating whether to return home, I lifted my eyes again and saw, right above me, the moon. It is then that a terrifying image struck me, transforming my dream into nightmare.

I saw our familiar moon in its splendor, but its position was *more distant* in the sky. At the same time, it was *bigger*. Beside it, two small *satellites* turned one around the other, like twin stars. It was the sight of these two celestial bodies that I knew, even then, to be foreign to the sky, which filled me with a strange anguish, and woke me.

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The image I describe in this dream figures, I believe, at a certain moment in all human dreams, and seems to belong, though the circumstances vary, to a collective unconscious—an idea that should not be pursued along positivist lines. It has therefore the value of a dream type, arising as it does from these staggering celestial visions that render null and void more than one grand principle of the moderns.

There exists a cosmological *given*.
The human being finds itself in a dream, alone, in the agonizing night of the universe.
It feels, then, a terrible incompatibility between living matter and the matter of the world.
And this world is huge, cold, empty, black.

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Now, the historical relation toward the world is thoroughly vital and social: its role is biological in the strict sense. Life within communities tends first and foremost to obliterate any consciousness of our participation in the cosmic course. The role of history, even in its most murderous epochs, is to reassure, to force us to live, to provide a counterbalance to the fear of the stars.

In dream, the *historical* given is progressively abolished along with the disappearance of symbols. As all diurnal residues disappear, as the oneiric current deepens, cosmic consciousness continues to rise with over-powering force. Upon waking, as we take up the ties that bind us to bright-lit day, the more we forget the truth that the dream managed to lay bare before us. . . . Lightened of its historical and parasitic elements, the dream recalls to us, obsessively, that before all we are the inhabitants of a *planet* and that we live literally in the sky.

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The true point that ties dream and madness is the sentiment of immediate and effective belonging to the world of stars and planets.

In our day to belong in a *conscious* manner to the cosmos can become, by various paths, a tyrannical idea: when thought takes itself for its own object—when it is constantly aware of itself as thought—this idea invades it and creates, depending on its presence or absence, an ontological difference between beings.

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In diurnal life, as in dream, the irruption of the cosmological given begins with a strange disquietude. This is nothing but a veiled and obscure form of the cosmic, whatever might be the explanation of this phenomenon provided by psychoanalysis (no doubt valid in its own sphere). . . . One would like to define this strange disquietude as the fortuitous meeting of a familiar object with the cosmic charge that it reflects.

Our consciousness of belonging to the celestial sphere should, in the future, be incorporated into revolutionary consciousness.

There is an error in believing that one must turn away from this awareness in order to serve an immediate cause, and in believing that any attempt to overturn the present conditions of the human world should put it out of mind.

FROM PART ONE: "SHADOW TACTICS"

The breath that moves us is absolutely other; the *unknown* that draws us cannot be mistaken for a secret; it must not be supposed to exist outside of us like an uncharted earth that awaits its explorers. It is ourselves, this unknown—not determined from above, but to be discovered in the atmospheric halo of our own lives, such as we *invent* it.

This is not necessarily a matter of devoting oneself to the discovery of an invisible world symmetrical to the visible one, as black magic proposes, or of setting out upon the traditional stairways of pure esotericism, but rather of the liberation of the unknown according to *exclusively* poetic methods and which, though involving an immense initiatory effort, would take place outside of any ritual understood as a mode of harnessing certain energies. And if within the framework of method, to dream is also to create an antinomy to resolve, in that of poetry, to dream is also to create the world. By this we see, moreover, that what the psychological, nocturnal dream has splendidly accomplished within the universe of determination, the *active reverie* can now do within the invisible universe, beyond

all antinomy, opening a passage from written automatism to automatism dialectically negated.

Once arrived at this point, and to make way for the *dreamers* who straddle the boundary between nocturnal dream and diurnal reverie through their negation of the binary—even if they are now engaged in another struggle—we must reconsider the basic composition of revolutionary collectives, for an organizational weakness persists across all the modern movements of emancipation and affects all efforts toward changing the present state of the world.

In addressing the conflict between knowing and doing, we can use the vocabulary of psychology to assert that, to varying degrees, two divergent types of revolutionaries compete for dominance over all poetic development. The first can be called "anarchic"—an attitude formed on the basis of schizophrenic correspondences—while the second, under the name of "hierarchic," appears to conceal a more or less opposed attitude, formed on the basis of an invincible separation between subject and world. . . . Everything that supposes an acceptance of and final accommodation to life as defined by biology, however vehement its initial refusal; everything that, despite its initial refusal of integration, finally amounts to affirmation of the social; everything that appears as manifest content in the dialectic of facts; all this is the work of the hierarchics, around whom the anarchics come to gather, these latter marked first and foremost by their fundamental inadequacy before the very fact of living, though they draw their energy from the latent springs of the epoch. Thus is the case for all the great suicides whom we carry within us. . . . In order that this appalling rivalry find its end, it is indispensable that these two revolutionary types who, often with great purity and clarity, vie with each other for efficacy in all revolutionary action, be annulled as such. And just as, in the economic sphere, the value of declassment by far outstrips the problem of origins, it appears evident that the hierarchic type of organization, along with anarchic abandon, must be finally renounced in favor of a *spiritually* heightened schizophrenia—one that has finally vanquished its fundamental clumsiness and unfitness for living in a reversal—a turning back toward life—that corresponds exactly to that proposed in the dreamer's case.

If in this way schizophrenia, within the spiritual order, is able to negate itself and take up its vital circuit *on a higher plane*, and is thus able to negate the stage of real or virtual suicide that in all circumstances characterizes it—in making life the equal of death and no longer finding

in the latter the only true solution, dilatory and useless as all earthly acts might seem—only then will the *revolutionary will* take a leap forward, without peril of abandonment to one side or the other, only then will the advent of a true poetic collective become a certainty. . . . With the massive advent of the *turning of thought upon itself*, mere psychological madness, changing its role, will be succeeded by a Sur-Madness, the only acceptable kind: pure clairvoyance of the mind and spirit, released from all psychopathological complications.

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Given that an integral part of the responsibility for the generally monstrous development of humanity, from deep history onward, falls to humanity itself—that it is humanity that elevates its tyrants and its traitors—it is not up to us to directly resolve this problem, in which we nonetheless participate. Insoluble in any case, it would place upon our shoulders the heavy and distressing burden of our entire evolutionary past, would oblige us to be its involuntary heir, would cast us into the redoubts of contradiction, would destroy our sustaining armature. We need not respond to this diversionist solicitation, nor make any effort, condemned in advance, to recover its evasive threads.

As our contract is above all with ourselves, we must, in fact, accept the present existence of a new spiritual race, and that it is the heir, in the secular order, of all that was insurgent in the past: of the negators, the enlightened dreamers and the magicians, of the great lovers, the true poets, and the rebels, and of all those who gratuitously refused life. It is only for this romantic, this young humanity that we are responsible, and only from it can we deduce the existence of a generalized humanity, of a generalized youth. . . . The beginnings of this new spiritual "race," first brought about by a psychic mutation characterized first and foremost by this turning of thought upon itself—thus by the detachment of the function of thought from its primordially biological and social uses, in a moment of heretical and romantic awakening—have only today found their true resonance.

Thought's gradual passage from creator of productive relations to creator of relations gratuitous from the biological point of view—in the past visible only in brief flashes and exceptions—can at any instant take a *massive* form. The poetic movement belongs before all to this passage and this mutation, but also guides it from afar. The new relationship that this mutation creates between being and thought—first set in motion, to use contemporary terms, with the acceptance of the unconscious by the conscious mind—leaves the rest of our technical, scientific, and critical

preoccupations in the stone age. The poet, whatever his domain, reveals himself by this alchemical annulment of the infrastructure, or more exactly its annulment by way of refusal to satisfy its demands, at the risk of his life.

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The reversal of schizophrenic suicide into a life-within-life, multicolored flame ushering the beyond into the present, depends on one essential condition: a revision of relations between the actors, of the matrix of attitudes and their associated rites, within the revolutionary constellation.

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Revolutionary action, in any future form of organization that it chooses, must yield to the dreamer, who has pursued the negation of life to the point that life itself becomes the terrain of his dreams. . . . A movement will flourish if it has managed to reconcile dream and action, but not only this: in the poetic sphere, or in any domain that does not seek to imitate other movements in their diurnal efficiency, dream itself is action. . . . An automatism of action, which can take the form only of a dream without memory, a diurnal dream, depends for its realization not only on keeping its proper distance from the obstacle, but on the formation of a collective within which liberty is experienced immediately as pleasure. . . . A true method of collective action allows the dreamers the possibility of outward effectiveness, but for this the method must be truly collective, and not take the form of a conglomerate in which agitators and utopians grapple for influence at its heart—for so far this is how, despite much resistance, the principles of action within the external world have been conveyed to us.

The real functioning of *free* thought depends first and foremost on the purification of internal relations within the collective superego of revolutionaries who have reached the point of fusion.

The *liberation* of poets, as described here, would be the equivalent of the unprecedented liberty attained, amid the dynamic equilibrium of psychic forces, by automatic writing. But first, an utterly new form of love-friendship must heal the poets' great emotional wound—a wound whose origin we cannot place, but which must all the same have arisen with the first emergence of a separation between self and nonself, with the struggle of the pleasure principle with the so-called reality principle— a wound that, before today, nothing could heal except death, supreme remedy of the dreamer.

TRANSLATION BY CATHERINE HANSEN

TROST | FROM *VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE*

BLACK SEA

ARAS ÖZGÜN

I left my father's hometown on the Black Sea coast a few months after the military coup, not knowing that it would take so long before I went back there. I was eleven years old when I left; so many things that you remember from childhood start to fit into their places and make sense only after you grow up. For example, as a kid I knew that "fascism" was a bad thing, but it was only much later that I figured out why, that year, all of a sudden, people stopped cursing it in public. I came from one of the "older," well-known families of the small town, and I used to play mostly with kids whose families my folks knew. "Children's playground" did not exist as a concept then; we used to play on the rocks at the seaside, in the backyards of country houses, in the narrow alleys separating them, and, preferably, in the old cemetery behind Demas's shabby corner store, which was turned into a weirdly terraced playing field after the gravestones were removed. Nobody knew or cared much about whose unmarked graves we were playing soccer on. We would stop by Demas' store before going back home after the match. He was an unshaven man who wore thick wool sweaters even in the summer; he would always greet us with a big smile and give us candies, "gazoz" (soda), and other kinds of forbidden foods. I was one of his favorite kids in the neighborhood. Perhaps he felt some affinity toward me because of my name, which was as strange as his. Or, at least, it must have been something easy for him

to remember and utter out loud, joyfully, each time I walked into his store. Against our parents' consent, on adventurous days we would extend our playground toward the ruins of the abandoned church, inside which the moldy air was thick with the smell of urine, shit, and dust. Ruins of abandoned churches were scattered throughout the central neighborhoods of the town, in the vicinity of large stone buildings and mansions that stood out among the indistinct modest country houses and newer concrete apartment blocks. Only one church was still intact and in use as a children's library, which became one of my favorite hangouts after I had learned to read. Some of the kids I played with lived in those stone mansions, they also came from the "older" families of the town. One of them was this chubby freckle-faced kid, with whom I shared my desk at school from time to time. His family owned a car dealership, but that wasn't their only source of prestige; he was the grandson of a national hero, "Topal Osman" (Osman the Hobbler). Topal Osman was buried on top of the citadel overlooking the city, his marble tomb stood next to the old cannon that pointed toward Russia across the sea. He was a hero of the national liberation war, he commanded his band of Black Sea militia and fought next to Atatürk against the Greeks, we were told. He was wounded in the war and walked with a limp, hence his nickname "Topal." After the liberation war, he was honored and decorated for his bravery and deeds, and subsequently became a high-ranking army commander. But then, we were also told, at some point in the early years of the Republic, he fell prey to a political conspiracy; he was executed without trial and his body was sent back to his hometown, which still embraced him by burying him in a place of honor on the highest ground in the town. Even a child would know that history has never been fair and just in this part of the world, especially to good people, so it all made sense and nobody asked what the conspiracy had been. Topal Osman's sword hung proudly on the wall at my friend's house, and no other kid, no other house had that kind of prestige. My great-grandfather was a veteran of the liberation war too, but all that was left to my grandmother was a small golden medallion attached to some silly red ribbon, something you could actually buy at the flea market because after the war most veterans sold them for their value in gold. But Topal Osman's huge shiny sword hung spectacularly alone in the middle of the big empty stone wall, and it meant something. I ran into my friend years later once again in Istanbul, where he was studying law apparently. He told me that, unlike

me, he was going back and forth to our hometown almost every week. He was taking the overnight ferry; there was this university student working as a tour guide on the ferry, and she didn't mind fucking him during the trip to earn a few extra bucks.

It was much later, when I worked with a German filmmaker who was tracing her Greek grandfather's deportation from the Black Sea to Greece, that I came across Topal Osman's name again. I had to translate an interview she made with a ninety-year old villager from the Black Sea who couldn't recall coherently anything related to the fighting between the Greek and Turkish gangs after the fall of the Ottoman central authority. In the middle of her incomprehensible murmurs the old woman paused for a moment, consumed with a terrifying image; she mumbled: "And then, there was Topal Osman, he was worse than the Greeks." I had to rewind the tape over and over to make sure that she was indeed mentioning the name of my hometown's local hero. After years of "schooling" in the history of the Republic, by then I was almost convinced that Topal Osman had been a small guy who was exaggerated out of proportions in his little town, since the books hardly ever mentioned his name. I figured out that it was indeed the same Topal Osman by bringing together bits and pieces of stories that never made it into the official history books. He was an *Ittihat ve Terakki* (Union and Progress Party) officer, a veteran of the Balkan wars, which left him lame. After returning to his hometown, he commandeered a small band of thugs in the mountains of the region. In the aftermath of World War I, with the British fueling their hopes, the predominantly Greek population of the region began to dream of reviving the Pontus Greek state in the Eastern Black Sea. That gave Topal Osman, who was still a nationalist *Ittihat ve Terakki* member, carte blanche to attack the rich Greek families and pillage their properties. His fearful gang grew in numbers as he spread his operations from Samsun to Trabzon. Topal Osman's terror had political repercussions on an international scale: the Greeks' failed bid for independence, followed by terror between Greek and Turkish gangs, provided an excuse for the mass deportation of the former population. The Governor of Samsun, who still wanted to resolve the issue under state authority, declared Topal Osman an outlaw who would face the consequences if he and his gang entered the province. In retaliation, and Topal Osman's gang laid siege to the deportation convoys exiting Samsun at the border and annihilated the deportee families en masse. By the time of the Independence War, the "Pontus problem" was resolved that way, and Topal Osman's small but

reckless guerilla army was ready to be deployed first at the western front, and after the war, to suppress the Kurdish rebellion in the southeast. *Ittihat ve Terakki* became the sole governing power after the founding of the Republic. Topal Osman was appointed as the head of the elite army unit that served Atatürk directly—the Presidential Guards, who were composed of his Black Sea gang. Within the same year, as soon as the splits in the first parliament appeared, a vocal member of the opposition was found dead in Ankara. A few months later, when another representative opposing Atatürk's power clique was found dead, such terror was deemed no longer tolerable for the new Republic. Topal Osman and his men were surrounded at Papaz'in Bagi, a valley close to the Presidential Palace in the outskirts of Ankara. After an intense battle lasting four days, he was killed, and his body was sent back to the Black Sea. The town had changed a lot since I left. The abandoned churches that once smelled of piss, shit, and dust had been restored, and opened to tourism as historical sites. Fancy apartment blocks had risen on the once empty cemetery. Topal Osman's marble grave did not stand out quite as magnificently as before, within the newly restored walls of the citadel. I asked my uncle who was showing me around and telling me about the old days, "What happened to the Greeks?"—as if I didn't know. His blue eyes looked away, "None are left, all went away" he said, as if he didn't know. "What about Demas, isn't he Greek?" I asked sincerely. He smiled, "Well, Demas is not his real name. He used to be a fisherman. Before you were born, he was selling at that little store the fish he caught. He called his store "Deniz Mahsulleri Satis" (Seafood Sales Store), but the tiny storefront didn't have enough space for the whole title, so he shortened it to "De.Ma.S." The fish store went out of business, but its name stuck to him. Even I don't remember the poor sap's real name, Ahmet or something?" I didn't ask, then, why my Muslim mother would give me painted eggs at a certain time of the year.

Paul Klee, in order to dismiss the tired question "is art for the people, or for the sake of art?" from an avant-garde position, once said that "art is for the people who are not there yet." In that case, photographs—always arrested somewhere between the past and the present—are for the people who are not there anymore.

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